

DOCTORAL THESIS

From egg to dead small-scale chicken keeping in modern Britain

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FROM EGG TO DEAD
SMALL-SCALE CHICKEN KEEPING
IN MODERN BRITAIN

by

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A thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of PhD

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ABSTRACT

In course of the last ten years there has been a strong increase in the number of chicken keepers who keep chickens on a small-scale and for non-commercial reasons in the gardens of their homes. The aim of this thesis is to explore the practice of chicken keeping and to understand these keepers' motivations, attitudes, and the relationships they have to their chickens. I adopt an ethnographic approach based on one-off visits and extended stays with chicken keepers, auto- and virtual ethnographic methods and semi-structured interviews. I discuss the architecture keepers use to protect and to contain chickens and the boundaries they draw between human and chicken spaces. I discuss instances when chickens become matter-out-of-place and consequently the identities they are assigned (e.g. vandal or cheeky visitor) and ways they are classified as animals, often between the pet-livestock distinction. Enskilment processes and skilled sensing are essential aspects of the practice of chicken keeping and are discussed while considering all human senses when engaging with and knowing how to keep chickens. Keepers get to know intimately, some as named individuals, others as members of a small flock, the chickens they live with. On the other hand, some chicken keepers are mostly interested in the productive qualities of their chickens and in the practice of producing food at home. I relate material on the attitudes and motivations of keepers to literature on the back-to-the-land movement, nostalgia for the countryside and the idealised imagery of the rural idyll. I suggest that chickens represent a symbol for the idealised rural idyll and that the keeping of chickens is a way for some small-scale chicken keepers to live the rural idyll without giving up the conveniences of modern British life.

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1 Introduction

Chickens are everywhere, an omnipresent part of British food cultures. Their meat and eggs are consumed more than any other animal product today. We can trace chickens in our daily lives as part of our language. Characteristics and adjectives related to chickens are being used for describing human behaviour, such as “being a chicken”, “pecking order” or “hen-pecked”. Similarly, depictions of chickens and eggs feature in art and in form of images and drawings on crockery and other household items such as aprons and oven clothes, and in form of figurines and other decorative items in many British homes.

Yet live chickens remain invisible in most of modern British everyday life. Most people in Britain, especially the urban population, have only rarely or never encountered live chickens. Their closest and most intimate encounters with chickens involve finding chicken on their dinner plate and eating their flesh (Morgan & Cole 2011). Given the popularity of chicken-related food products, each month in the UK there are around 75-80 million chicks raised for their meat and as future egg producers (DEFRA 2016), yet those live chickens remain almost completely invisible to us, being kept in large-scale commercial chicken farms. Images of commercial farms we are presented with in television advertisements, on egg box packages and other marketing material are of idealised settings with chickens roaming free on fresh green grassland. These images give us a distorted idea of how most of those millions of chickens live and die and an inaccurate and distant understanding of the actual life and needs of these animals and our relationships with them.

The exception is a number of people who *do* know live chickens and who have personal relationships with them. They care for, interact with, talk to, often name them, and usually consume their eggs and sometimes also their meat. They know their chickens' behaviour, daily rhythms and develop diverse, sometimes intimate relationships with them. In this thesis I will explore the human-chicken relationship in this context and how and why these people keep chickens on a small scale for primarily non-commercial reasons.

In the following sections I will first introduce the contemporary small-scale chicken-keeping culture in Britain and review previous research related to chicken keeping in the UK. I will then define my research subject before moving on to describe the relevant history of small-scale chicken keeping and the place of chickens in the UK in the past. Finally, I will discuss relevant literature from the fields of Human-animal Studies and Animal Geography, to which this thesis contributes, before turning to discuss my aims and research questions.

1.1 Small-scale chicken keeping in Britain

Little is known about the numbers and characteristics of chicken keepers in the UK. It is mandatory for chicken-keepers to register and provide information about their chickens to the Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) only if they keep 50 birds or more. Chicken keepers with fewer than 50 birds, are encouraged to register but can remain anonymous (DEFRA 2014a)¹. Due to this voluntary registration, the number of chicken keepers can only be estimated. Estimates range from 500,000 (Scott 2008;

¹ I will discuss the relationship between small-scale chicken keepers and DEFRA in chapter 7 'Edible pets – transgressing boundaries'.

Bettany & Kerrane 2011; Hough 2012) to 750,000 (Fitzpatrick 2013) households keeping chickens.

We know that there has been a strong increase in the number of small-scale chicken keepers in the last 15 years in both rural and urban areas. Since the early 2000s a new goods and services market has emerged focusing specifically on small-scale chicken keepers. The establishment and popularity of commercial online market sites (e.g. omlet.co.uk and flytesofancy.co.uk) and advice blogs and forums (e.g. keeping-chickens.me.uk and thechickenstreet.wordpress.com) are also evidence of this trend. Furthermore, there has been extensive news and blog coverage of this phenomenon. *The Guardian online* features a weekly chicken keeping blog in their Life and Style section titled 'Talking chickens', in their home & gardening section. Similarly, *The Telegraph* publishes regular articles in their gardening section, for example, 'How to keep hens happy' (Raymond 2011b).

Over the last ten years, the number of chicken keeping related publications in selected online newspapers peaked between 2009 and 2012, but has been decreasing since (see Figure 1). The novelty of the new chicken-keeping trend and the interest in chicken-keeping related articles and advice columns seems to have been saturated. As Francine Raymond, the author of several chicken keeping articles for *The Telegraph* and several other newspapers and magazines expressed it during an interview, "There is only so much you can say about chicken keeping". Newspaper articles on the activities of chicken keepers cover a variety of perspectives – from critical pieces to idealising, but most notably instructive and informative pieces such as in *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph*.

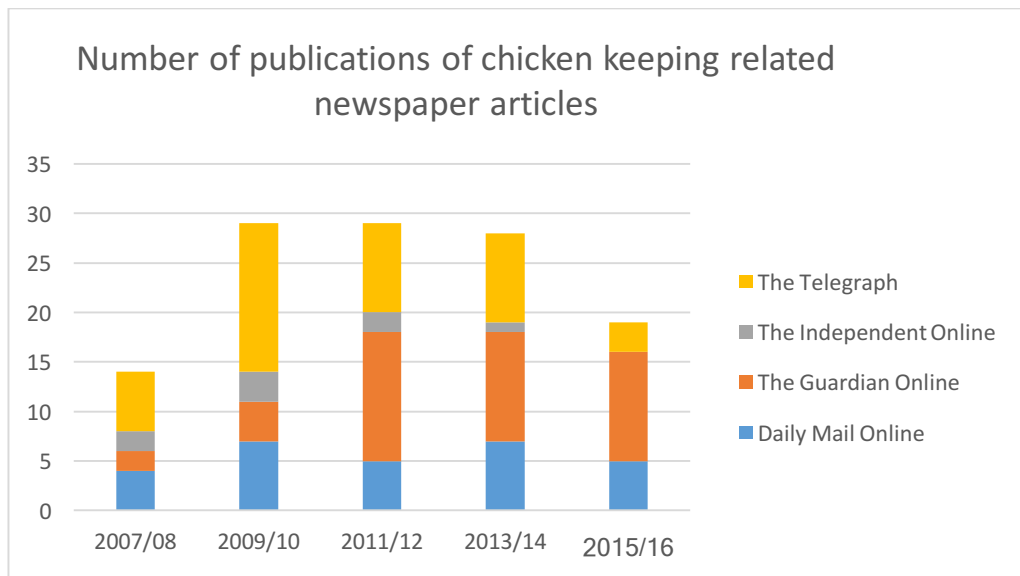


Figure 1 Number of publications in 2-year intervals 2007/08 - 2015/16

A great number of books on chicken keeping are available online and in most bookshops. On a recent visit at Foyles at Charing Cross Road, I found 11 different guides on chicken keeping in store, among them *Keeping Chickens for Dummies – UK edition* (Riggs et al. 2011). There are numerous examples of chicken keepers who wrote books on chicken keeping [e.g. *Chickens as Pets* by Hinkinson (2013); *Chickens* by Baldwin (2012) which I also came across on my Foyles trip]. Besides this increased interest of print and news media for this phenomenon, chicken keepers themselves have become active advocates and promoters as well. Besides published books authored by chicken keepers mentioned above, some have also created unpublished, informal guides on how to keep chickens for other chicken keepers, while others started offering chicken keeping courses or recorded YouTube videos explaining aspects of their activities (e.g. Warwickshire Chickens 2012). Many small-scale chicken keepers started to participate in social media groups, to use the Internet to inform others, to learn about chicken keeping, and to exchange their experiences with each other. Examples of such groups on Facebook are *Chicken Keeping*

UK with 8523 members, *Chicken Keeping in the UK – Hints and Tips and Buying and Selling* with 3727 members and *Cockerel Trader* with 4347 members².

Chicken keeping is now more than just a hobby for a specialised small group of people. With the news coverage, advice columns, YouTube videos, published books and magazines, and the availability of chicken houses, treats and toys in commercial stores (e.g. Homebase and Pets At Home) it has become evident that keeping chickens is no longer a niche activity. Considering the estimated number of people keeping chickens (conservative estimates are at 500,000 households) and the interest of the public in this phenomenon, a study of this group of people, their motivations, and a closer understanding of this specific set of human-animal relationships is of great relevance. Research on small-scale chicken keepers in Britain however has been limited to date. In the following section I will present the existing research on small-scale/hobbyist chicken keepers in Britain and then move on to define and demarcate my research topic.

1.1.1 Other research on chicken keeping in the Britain

While substantial research on commercial chicken keeping and chickens kept as livestock has been undertaken (Boyd 2001; Godley & Williams 2007; de Jonge & van Trijp 2013; Buller & Roe 2014; DEFRA 2016) few studies have focused on the relationships humans have with and attitudes they have towards live chickens. The American anthropologist and ethnographer Molly Mullin (2013) discussed the attitudes of small-scale, urban chicken keepers towards their chickens in the United States. Her ethnographic account focused on her personal experiences with her chickens and her changing attitudes

² Member numbers accurate as of 31st of October 2017.

towards chickens. She also used material she collected during a commercially-offered coop-tour of urban backyard chicken keepers. This tour gave her the opportunity to engage with, and interview, urban backyard chicken keepers. Bettany and Kerrane (2011), who researched the British chicken keeping culture, analysed a specific purpose-built chicken house, which has been especially popular among new chicken keepers in Britain, the Eglu. Mullin (2013) and Bettany and Kerrane (2011) each discussed the meaning of material culture of chicken keeping, especially of chicken houses and what they can tell us about the ethics and attitudes of small-scale chicken keepers. I will describe and further discuss chicken housing and the Eglu in chapter 4 and also relate it back to Mullin's (2013) and Bettany and Kerrane's (2011) research.

Davis (1995), an animal rights advocate and author, discusses the moral positioning of domesticated animals and focuses on the chicken in her essay. She argues that environmentalists have aimed to protect the rights of wild and free animals but neglected to treat domesticated and selectively bred animals, such as chickens, with equal care and compassion. Davis (1995) discusses material on the moral classification of chickens, and her personal relationship with her pet chicken, to discuss parallels with how women have been perceived and treated in Western culture.

Karabozhilova et al. (2012) also studied small-scale chicken keepers in the UK. Their study is based on a small-sample survey (n=65, of which 30 participants were small-scale chicken keepers), created baseline data about common diseases of and welfare conditions that chickens experience in small-scale chicken keeping settings in Greater London. This study focused particularly on the potential biosecurity risks and welfare issues in small-scale chicken keeping settings and the attitudes small-scale chicken keepers have towards

DEFRA and its regulations. The results of the survey were analysed quantitatively and provided a basic idea of the characteristics of small-scale chicken keepers in the UK. However, they should be treated with caution because of the limited sample size. The small-scale chicken keepers (n=30) based in Britain who took part in this study were two thirds (n=20) female and one third (n=10) male. Most of them were in an age category of 25-40 years (37%). The chickens kept by those small-scale chicken keepers were of 20 different breeds of mostly mixed breed flocks. Chicken keepers kept between two and 37 chickens with an average of four chickens per household.

The Scottish Government's Centre of Expertise on Animal Disease Outbreaks (EPIC) studied the awareness and knowledge of biosecurity risks among small-scale poultry keepers in the Aberdeenshire and Fife area (Kyle & Sutherland 2018). They acknowledge that very little is known about the practices of small-scale poultry keepers. Kyle and Sutherland (2018) conduct 37 interviews with poultry keepers with a small to medium number of poultry (fewer than 500 birds) and consulted five veterinarians for their study. They found that keepers perceive a low disease risk related to their activities as chicken keepers. While the primary focus of Kyle and Sutherland (2018) was to explore awareness of biosecurity risks related to poultry keeping, they also gained insights in the practices of chicken keepers. They found that the keepers drew much of their information related to poultry keeping from books, Facebook, and magazines. They acquire their birds from specialised breeders, auctions and battery hen charities.³

³ This report was published after the submission of my PhD thesis. My findings agree with Kyle and Sutherland (2018) in terms of the sources and places keepers source their birds and information from. I also found that there was only limited awareness of the biosecurity risks related to chicken keeping. I have not considered Kyle and Sutherland's (2018) findings in the discussion of my empirical material in the main text of this thesis.

Several qualitative researchers studied the new emergence, the place, and the motivations of hobby farmers, who often kept poultry as well (Fairweather & Robertson 2000; Holloway 2001; Holloway 2002; Halfacree 2006; Wilkie 2010). While they also focused on the attitudes of smallholders and hobby farmers towards their animals, they did not specifically focus on human-chicken relationship in small-scale non-commercial settings.

This short review of previous research literature underlined the fact that not much is known about the practice of small-scale chicken keeping in Britain and that there is a gap, in terms of qualitative research of their attitudes and motivations and a lack of understanding for these specific human-chicken relationships.

1.1.2 Demarcation of the research topic

At the outset it is important to note that there are groups of small-scale chicken keepers, which will not form part of this study. Since the late 19th century in the UK, there has been a vibrant culture of breeding chickens for display, exhibition, and competition (Potts 2012). This is a rich and complex social and cultural world; so much so that it could not be part of my research. In this thesis, I am interested in the motivations of small-scale chicken keepers who choose to keep chickens for reasons primarily other than showing them in competitions. Chicken keepers who keep chickens on a small scale for other reasons than for breeding them and showing them at poultry shows have different relationships with and attitudes towards these animals. I also will not focus on chicken keepers who keep chickens solely for commercial reasons or smallholders with a strong focus on commercial

poultry production. This is because I was interested in the relationships small-scale chicken keepers have with their chickens rather than the relationships that commercial farmers have with the livestock that provides them with a primary source of income and which productive qualities they depend on to financially survive. While some of my respondents were smallholders, none of them financially depended on the produce of chickens. This thesis explores the practice of small-scale chicken keeping and with it the human-chicken relationship, regular routines, material culture, ways of learning, and pleasures and difficulties related to this activity. It sheds light on the motivations, attitudes, and perceptions of small-scale chicken keepers in Britain.

After this brief presentation of the research topic, and before I move on to introduce my research aims, I will describe the socio-cultural circumstances in which this phenomenon is situated. I will provide a historical overview of the key events and social movements that influenced the relationships we have with chickens today. First, I will discuss how chicken meat and eggs became the most popular and cheapest animal-based food products. I will then proceed to describe the beginnings of the animal welfare and green movements of the 1960s/70s that had a great impact and parallels to the small-scale chicken-keeping trend of today. Finally, I will provide a comprehensive review of related literature and research on human-animal relations and multi-species ethnography which supplied me with the key concepts and theories I will use to discuss the ethnographic material I generated during the course of my project.

1.1.3 Chickens for food

From the beginning of the 20th century, chicken keepers recognised the potential of farming chickens on a larger scale and discovered a yet unexplored commercial market and source of income. Until then, households and farms that kept chickens often only had between 200-400 hens primarily as egg producers, fed them farmyard scraps and left them to forage, rather than providing them with specialized poultry feed (Godley & Williams 2007). The *Feathered Life* magazine which was dedicated to the topics of utility poultry and domestic pets was founded in 1903 and covered topics that are very similar to issues discussed in contemporary poultry magazines that targeted modern small-scale chicken keepers e.g. *Practical Poultry, Your Chickens*. The first issue of *Feathered Life*, from 1903, for example, contains articles on the hatching and rearing of chicks in incubators, and the defending of small flocks of chickens against predators and mites (see Figure 2). Furthermore, these magazines contain advertisements for purpose built small-scale chicken shelters and housing and provide advice on how to build your own shelter. They provide information on the optimal mix of feed for utility chickens reared for consumption and advice on numerous other techniques for keeping poultry healthy and turning them into productive egg layers. These issues, topics and advertised chicken- keeping related products are strongly reminiscent of the discourses in modern small-scale chicken-keeping magazines.

Industrialisation led to an influx of labourers from the countryside into the cities, who began growing food on allotments offered by the local authorities (Martin & Marsden 1999). During the First and Second World Wars people increasingly relied on the food produced on allotments and in 1944 the state encouraged their activities with the 'Dig for Victory' campaign. The government encouraged home food production, Victory Gardens

and the keeping of chickens as additional sources of valuable animal protein. The 'Dig for Victory' campaign in combination with strict rationing during the war encouraged an increase in the numbers of small-scale chicken keepers in rural and urban areas (Way & Brown 2010; Martin & Marsden 1999).



Figure 2 Feathered Life magazine cover from 1903

During the 1940s, numerous poultry-keeping guides were published, the Poultry Advice Committee was created (Potts 2012) and the potential for growing the poultry industry was recognized. This was primarily due to the quickly-growing focus on industrial scale

poultry farming and its achievements in the United States during that time. In 1948, the first 'Chicken of Tomorrow' contest took place in the United States encouraging chicken breeders to breed especially-productive meat-types of chickens (Boyd 2001). As a result of these breeding contests and advances in poultry genetics, nutrition science and disease management from the 1940s onwards, the United States started to use two different types of chickens, a meat-type (in the United States referred to as 'broiler' and in the UK traditionally as 'table bird') and a highly productive egg-laying variety (referred to as a 'layer').

These commercial breeds of chickens, today known also as hybrid chickens, arrived in Britain in the 1950s (Crawford 1990; Barber et al. 2012) and marked the beginning of Britain's large-scale poultry industry. Until the 1950s, chickens were mainly kept for their eggs. Cockerels and spent chickens, i.e. hens that have stopped being productive layers, were slaughtered and used for their meat. The arrival of these highly desired function-specific breeds together with innovations and advances in other areas in poultry science such as improvements in chicken feed, scaling-up of poultry housing and new management techniques from the United States, made the production of poultry meat a focus on its own.

In addition to the industrialisation of the food system, the post-war era contained important social changes, which had an impact on the relationships people have had with chickens from this point onwards. In the 1950s and 1960s the employment-rate of women steadily increased. Faced with the double-burden, women now performed both paid work outside the domestic sphere and were responsible for homemaking and child-care (Dixon 2002). This meant that women had less time available to fulfil traditional homemaking

tasks such as the preparation of food and the production of food at home such as the growing of vegetables in their garden or the keeping of chickens. The 1950s also marked the beginning of convenience food and supermarkets providing families and especially women lacking the resources for time-consuming food preparation with a solution. New cooling and packaging techniques in supermarkets gave meat a longer shelf life. Industrial poultry and other livestock farming translated into a low production cost for meat which therefore became affordable, readily available for consumers and on demand (Dixon 2002). Food production, especially in relation to chicken meat, increasingly became an industrial activity and an enormous consumer market (Kim & Curry 1993).

In summary, since the 1950s, the poultry industry with the help of science has transformed chickens into “very efficient vehicle[s] for transforming feed grains into higher-value meat products” (Boyd 2001, 632). From the 1960s onwards, the international fast-food industry was a main driving factor for the steep growth in chicken meat consumption. The fried chicken market has been the fastest growing of all kinds of fast-foods (Kearney 2010). Chicken meat is also perceived as healthier choice compared with red meat, adding to its popularity (Dixon 2002). Consumers can purchase pieces of chicken meat free of traces of fat, bones, feathers and blood in supermarkets, ready to be prepared and eaten, making it easy to forget the live animal. Adams (2010) used the semiotic term ‘absent referent’ in relation to meat and the distance and disconnect that meat eaters experience in relation to live animals slaughtered for their meat.

Behind every meal of meat is an absence: the death of the animal whose place the meat takes. The ‘absent referent’ is that which separates the meat eater from the animal and the animal from the end product. The function of the absent referent

is to keep our 'meat' separated from any idea that she or he was once an animal, to keep the 'moo' or 'cluck' or 'baa' away from the meat, to keep something from being seen as having been someone (Adams 2010, 13).

Adams first published her theory of the absent referent in 1990 and was a key figure in the animal rights movement. She was one of many animal rights and animal welfare advocates who, from the 1960s, started to campaign for the improvement of the living conditions of farm animals. The following section will discuss the back-to-the-land movements, which were related to the animal welfare movement of the 1960s.

1.1.4 Back-to-the-land movements

From the 1960s animal welfare conditions in industrial livestock farms became increasingly a focus of the public eye. In 1964, Ruth Harrison, a British animal welfare activist, published *Animal Machines* criticising and informing the public about the conditions in which battery hens and other livestock were kept in commercial large-scale farms.

In parallel, and possibly driven by the same social pressures, the back-to-the-land movement developed during the late 1960s/70s. Halfacree (2006) described the back-to-the-land movement of the 1960s/70s as counter-culture movement against the emerging consumerism and productivism of the 1950s/60s, which also came with a high degree of urbanisation. While families enjoyed the conveniences and innovations that modern life brought, such as convenience food and fridges, at the same time people started to appreciate spending time in nature and in the countryside, leading a simpler life. Back-to-

the-landers were the idealistic urban population who moved more permanently to rural areas rejecting formal employment and a high level of consumption of mass-produced items, while producing food on their land or allotment, often keeping chickens and achieving a high level of self-sufficiency (Wilbur 2014). People who belonged to the back-to-the-land movement of the 1960s/1970s were often associated with the environmental movements of the 1960s/1970s.

Back-to-the-landers embraced organic agriculture, most notably permaculture, an alternative agricultural and food growing system, based on a set of principles that should maximize the production, while “mimic[ing] patterns and relationships found in nature” (Lockyer & Veteto 2013, 11). Part of the strong attraction of the return to or living off ‘the land’ was an, often idealised, idea of rural life and ideas associated with the concept rural idyll (Bunce 2003; Woods 2005; Wilbur 2014). According to Woods (2005) what comes to mind when we think of the rural, the countryside, or the land, is socially constructed and can be explored by defining different forms of discourses of rurality.⁴ Woods (2005) defined discourse as “a way of understanding the world” (2005, 12) and argued that there are different understandings of what rurality means to people. Besides academic discourses, which are how academics frame and understand rurality, and the hedonist discourses, in which the rural is a space for leisure and recreation, he additionally discusses popular and lay discourses of rurality. This is the rurality of ordinary people, reproduced in cultural and popular media such as in television, art and cultural media

⁴ Besides this approach of defining the rural as a social construct, Woods (2005) also discusses the definitions of the rural according to socio-cultural and socio-economic characteristics and according to differences in structural features between the urban and the rural localities.

(Woods 2005) and this is the idea of the rural idyll that attracted and still attracts so many people.

According to Evans and Yarwood (1995, 141) "livestock are an integral part of rural landscapes." Similarly, Jones (2003) put a strong emphasis on the centrality of animals in the social construction of the rural. Livestock is a fundamental element in the televisual representations of and in the cultural understanding of the rural as imagined idyll. He provided the example of a television family drama he encountered by chance, in which an urban family moves from London to the Devon countryside, to become smallholders and live off the land:

In this drama animals played a key role in setting the rural scene and moving the plot along. [...] One of the first moments of harmony and signs of the promise ahead is when the cow they had bought on the local market gives birth to a calf, right outside the house [...] The mum has trouble milking the family cow by hand [...] The younger daughter, who is bullied at her new school, sits in the sty with the piglets reading and talking to them, and is later found by her worried mum curled up asleep with them.

Jones' (2003, 285) observations about this drama could be interchangeably made for many other television and film productions that feature an urban family moving to the countryside. Arguably the most popular British television series that falls into the living-off-the-land category is *The Good Life*, which was first aired in the late 1970s. This series was mentioned many times by the chicken keepers I interviewed, most notably in relation to their motivations and attitudes toward chicken keeping (see chapter 8). In the first

episode of *The Good Life*, a middle-class couple in their late-thirties decide that they want more from life than to only work and consume. The following excerpt of a dialog between the main characters gives a good idea of what urban people sought, when the living-off-the-land idea attracted them.

Tom: I've defined what it is. It's breaking the circle. [...] Going to work, to get money, to translate into things, which we use up, which makes you go to work again, etc. etc. – the norm! [...] How to put this into practical terms? I quit work and we become as darn near self-sufficient as possible. We have bags of garden. We grow our own food. We keep some animals, chickens, a pig. We produce our own energy. We recycle rubbish. We design the things we need.

Barbara: You want to sell up and buy a smallholding in the country with it?

Tom: No, no, no, this isn't meant to be the full going back to nature bit. Anyways, we love this house way too much to get rid of it.⁵

Tom and Barbara want to live off the land but do not want to give up their suburban home and life. Rather than living a rural life, they bring a small selected aspect of rural life into their suburban life. Barbara clearly states in the first episode that one of her conditions for agreeing to this adventure is that she will never have to kill a chicken. A few episodes later they cook and eat their own chicken – the chicken died of natural causes. The living off the land and back-to-the-land notions, a call for more self-sufficiency has been rediscovered more recently. According to Halfacree (2006) over the last 40 years there

⁵ I transcribed this excerpt personally from the television series *The Good Life*.

were two back-to-the-land movements: one during the late 1960s/1970s and one in the late 1990s/2000s. The more recent wave of enthusiasm for living off the land included a strong increase in people who kept chickens, the primary subjects of my research.

These historic and contemporary back-to-the-land waves can be also traced in the fluctuating number of documents published on home food production related themes. Google Books offers the quantitative analysis service 'Ngram', which enables phrases and word combinations searchers in all books and documents digitized by Google Books (Michel et al. 2011). I performed a search by using the word combinations 'keeping chickens' and 'keeping hens' and limited my search to books published in Britain. Ngram created a graph illustrating the frequency that books contained the specified word combinations since 1880 until 2008 (2008 seems to be the most recent year I could use for my analysis) (see Figure 3). The percentage point on the y-axis represent how often these word combinations were used in proportion to all words across all books in Google during the same time-point. The spikes between 1910 and the 1920s and 1940s till the early 1950s potentially show the increased interest in keeping chickens/hens during the years of wars as described earlier in this chapter. The frequency of the usage of phrase 'keeping chickens' in books peaks during the 1960s, which could correlate with the renewed interest in chicken keeping due to the back-to-the-land movements and environmental movements of the 1960s. Until the mid-1990s the interest in chicken keeping/hen keeping seems to decrease. From the mid-1990s until 2008 the frequency these phrases were used seem to increase steadily, a trend that correlates with what I have observed above.

In the final two sections of this chapter I will first review relevant literature and concepts of the field of human-animal studies and animal geography before I finally enumerate my thesis aims and research questions.



Figure 3 Ngram - % of all documents mentioning keeping chickens (red) and keeping hens (blue) recorded by Google Books

1.2 Literature on human-animal relationships

While scholars in the social sciences first seriously discussed the relationships and attitudes humans have towards animals in the 1990s and early 2000s, anthropological research has long considered animals “useful instruments of culture because they are highly flexible symbols” (Arluke & Sanders 1996, 3). Among this use of animals as a lens to understand culture is Evans-Pritchard’s (1940) research with his study of the Nuer and their cattle, Geertz’s (1973) study of the Balinese cockfighting culture and Lévi-Strauss’ research on animals and totemism (1963). Lévi-Strauss saw the potential of animals to understand social life and human culture and famously noted that animals⁶ are not just “good to eat” but are “good to think” [with] (1963, 89).

However, from the 1990s ethnographers have come to recognize animals and the human-animal relationships as a subject itself. Rather than just perceiving animals as a convenient window from which to analyse humans (Mullin 1999), human-animal relationships are now the focus of the studies, especially since the emergence of the field of Human-Animal Studies. Human-animal studies scholars consider “animals [...] not merely passive objects for humans to act upon or to use as tools or resources” (DeMello 2010, 148) and study the interactions and relationships between humans and animals, the ethics of how humans treat animals, which is inevitably also connected with the exploration of the boundaries between humans and animals (Arluke & Sanders 1996; Serpell 1996; Mullan & Marvin 1999; Cassidy & Mullin 2007; Haraway 2007; Kirksey & Helmreich 2010; DeMello 2012; Marvin & McHugh 2014). Philo and Wilbert (2000) and Haraway (2007) are

⁶ He actually referred to “natural species” but I chose to paraphrase it as animals as others in the field of human-animal studies did before. See e.g. (DeMello, 2012)

examples of scholars who challenged the boundary between humans and animals, referring to animals as non-human animals in their research and with it rejecting human exceptionalism among all species.

Multispecies ethnography derives from this rejection of human exceptionalism and can be considered a branch of human-animal studies (HAS), merging the ethnographic field method with the HAS perspective that “humans do not automatically take precedence over other beings” (Feinberg et al. 2013, 2). All living beings are intertwined, shaping and interacting with each other and ‘becoming with’ each other (Haraway 2007; Marvin & McHugh 2014), rather than evolving in isolated ways besides each other. While multi-species ethnographers still must acknowledge their inevitable human perspective, multispecies ethnography focuses on “the relations between multiple organisms (plants, viruses, human, and nonhuman animals), with a particular emphasis on understanding the human as emergent through these relations (“becoming”)” (Ogden et al. 2013, 6). A central concern in this thesis is to offer a grounded, ethnographic, account of particular chicken-keeping practices, by particular people, at a particular time, and to explore the cultural mileux of these practices. Overall, based on the literature of human-animal studies and multi-species ethnographers and my own ethnography, I explore the practices of chicken keeping, and the relationships formed between humans and chickens in these practices, and consider chickens not only as tools to better understand human culture, but as valuable research subjects in their own right.

In addition to literature by multispecies ethnographers I specifically make use of research by animal geographers (Philo & Wilbert 2000; Emel et al. 2002; Hinchliffe et al. 2005; Ginn 2012). I explore places and spaces that chickens take, examining processes of inclusion

and exclusion and shifting boundaries between categories of animals. Wolch (2002) focuses on the role of nature in shaping the urban experience and on the place of animals in the city. She challenges the idea of cities as an exclusively human domain and argues that the presence of animals and plants in cities has been ignored by geographers. Wolch (2002) also discusses the impact of city planning and zoning on the kind of animals that can be kept in cities, such as the exclusion of chickens, goats and pigs from residential areas. The forced classification of animals and patterns of inclusion and exclusion of animals from the cities has also been discussed by Mullin (2013) and Philo (1995).

Other work by scholars of human-animal relationships include Holloway (2001), Haraway (2007), and Latimer (2013), who explore instances when boundaries between the human and the animal spheres are transgressed and categories used for animals are shifted.

As chickens are considered livestock, productive animals, literature on human-livestock relationships is of great interest. Evans and Yarwood (1995) study of human-livestock relationships and suggest that there is a research gap in the study of the role and impact of livestock on rural British landscapes. I will turn to discuss the place of animals in a variety of environments in this thesis and I will consider the effect that chickens have on rural and urban landscapes.

Interactions and attitudes towards livestock were first investigated from the early 2000, especially through an animal welfare lens. Scholars, such as Velde et al. (2002), Wilkie (2010), Riley (2011) and Kauppinen et al. (2012) studied the relationships farmers and farm workers have with their livestock. The relationships and attitudes farmers and farm workers have to livestock have been studied by Wilkie (2010), who also discussed the relationships hobby farmers have with their animals. She defined four broad types of

relationships people, both at the hobby and commercial farming level, can have with their livestock. The first type, the relationship to a stock pet is similar to a traditional pet. There is a high degree of emotional attachment and, at death, it may be buried. The second type is the productive animal. This keeper/farmer accepts their livestock as individual beings and have these individuals stay with them for longer periods before they are slaughtered as they are used for breeding. The last two types of emotional relationships with livestock are the consumptive animal and the commodity animal. In the consumptive animal relationship between farmer/farm worker and livestock, the animal is perceived as part of a group rather than as an individual and is kept for slaughter and consumption. The last category, the commodity animal, is the most detached type perceived by humans as a mindless commodity to be sold.

As Holloway (2001, 296) pointed out, there has been a great variety of research exploring how animals are “related to, treated and imagined in different anthropological contexts, recognising that in practice, animals are often treated very differently to humans, and different animals are treated differently”. He stated that it is therefore important to examine which contexts and circumstances lead to these different treatments and attitudes towards animals, including the distinctions often made even within the same species. He especially highlighted the value of focusing on hobby-farmers or smallholders relationships to their animals, as “hobby-farms demonstrate some interesting ambiguities being places where concepts of work and leisure, and production and consumption, can become blurred” (Holloway 2001, 299). Holloway (2001) explored hobby-farming discourses and practices and their human-animal relationships in this context. He pointed out that the individualisation and personalities of livestock on the one hand, but also the productive qualities of these animals on the other hand is important for hobby-farmers.

Furthermore, Holloway explored the term 'smallholding' and 'smallholder', which I also use in this thesis. Holloways' interviewees suggested that the keeping of livestock is essential to the construction of 'smallholding' as place and as identity. While Holloway acknowledged that the term 'smallholding' is ill-defined and used in different context, he used the concept in a way that "implies small-scale, part-time food production, often motivated by a range of lifestyle choices involving the desire to leave a frenetic urban lifestyle in search of an imagined rural idyll" (2001, 298). As did Wilkie (2010), Holloway also explored different levels of emotional attachment of smallholders towards their livestock, covering pet-like attachments. He noticed, similarly to Wilkie (2010), that smallholders make a difference between animals consumed or kept-to-be-sold and animals used for breeding. Furthermore, he mentioned the distinctions made between traditional pets such as dogs and livestock living on the farm. While dogs and other traditional pet animals are permitted to access the house, livestock is kept outside and confined; reinforcing the conventional differences between animal categories.

Furthermore, I observed that many small-scale chicken keepers perceive their chickens and refer to their chickens as pets rather than as livestock [see for example *Chickens as Pets* a book written by a chicken keeper (Hinkinson 2013)] and thus literature on human-pet relationships is of great relevance and informed in my research. Tuan (1984) and Serpell (1996) challenged the category of pets and highlighted the dimensions of affection, dominance and power in the human-pet relationship. Holloway (2001), Wilkie (2010), and Mullin (2013) challenged the often too-simplistic classification of animals into livestock and pet categories and discuss the deeper complexity and the shadings and ambivalences in these kinds of human-animal relationships. Therefore, the discussion of the chicken in the context of small-scale chicken keeping provides an interesting context,

which elucidates several different ways chickens are treated depending on the attitudes and motivations of their keepers.

Grasseni (2007b), focuses, in a similar way to Wilkie (2010) on the relationships between breeders and livestock. In her ethnographic study, Grasseni (2007b) explored the practices and attitudes of dairy cow breeders and farmers in the Italian Alps and the processes of enskillment and “skilled vision” that knowledgeable breeders acquire as part of their social environment and their becoming part of a community of practice as defined by Wenger (2009). I will discuss ways of learning and processes of enskillment and skilled vision in the context of small-scale chicken keeping in chapter 5.

Velde et al. (2002) and De Jonge et al. (2013) studied the often-ambivalent attitudes consumers have towards the animals they consume and Adams (2010) focused on the relationships consumers have towards meat and highlighted the lack of associations consumers make between the meat they consume and the live animals that were slaughtered. In the next section I will introduce my aims and research question that guided my thesis.

1.3 [Aim and research questions](#)

The overarching aim of this thesis is to explore the small-scale chicken keeping culture in modern Britain with a focus on the human-chicken relationship in this context. The nature of the relationships and interactions people have with chickens in a non-commercial setting are unexplored and this thesis aims to open up the field to the study of this specific human-animal relationships by offering new perspective and insights towards it. The

following research questions, informed by the outlined review of literature in this chapter, guided my ethnographic study:

- 1) What kind of patterns, routines and activities are typically part of the practice of chicken keeping?
- 2) How do chicken keepers learn about chicken keeping and how do they become skilled chicken keepers?
- 3) What kind of material culture is part of the practice of chicken keeping and what can they tell us about the human-chicken relationships in the small-scale chicken keeping context?
- 4) In what ways do chicken keepers relate to their chickens and what kinds of attitudes do they have towards them?
- 5) What are the motivations of chicken keepers to keep chickens in a small-scale setting?
- 6) Do small-scale chicken keepers consider their chickens to be pets or livestock and is a classification limited to these categories useful?
- 7) How is current chicken keeping culture related to the concept of the rural idyll and the back-to-the-land movement?

To achieve the overarching aim and to answer my research questions I explored, studied and documented the following:

- 1) the terms and categories small-scale chicken keepers use to talk and think about chickens and how they differ from terms used by other social groups (chapter 3 'Classifying chickens');

- 2) the space chicken keepers create for themselves and their chickens and the objects they use related to the activities of chicken keeping (chapter 4 'The Architecture of chicken keeping');
- 3) ways of learning about chicken keeping and becoming skilled in it (chapter 5 'Apprenticeship in chicken keeping');
- 4) the human senses and their place and importance in the practice of chicken keeping (chapter 6 'Feeling (for) chickens');
- 5) the attitudes people have towards chickens in a small-scale chicken keeping setting (chapter 7 'Edible pets – transgressing boundaries');
- 6) the motivation chicken keepers have to keep chickens at home and its relations to the concept of rural idyll (chapter 8 'Living the good life – nostalgia').

1.4 Chapter Summary

In this chapter I introduced and defined my research focus, the contemporary small-scale chicken keeping culture in Britain. I reviewed existing literature on small-scale chicken keeping in Britain and identified a research gap in in-depth qualitative research on the activities and motivations of small-scale chicken keepers and the human-animal relationships in this context. Reviewing the historic background of the contemporary practice of chicken keeping, I highlighted the industrialisation of the poultry food sector, animal welfare and environmental movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and finally the back-to-the-land movements as described by Halfacree (2006). I then moved on to discuss relevant literature from the field of human-animal studies, to which this thesis contributes to, before defining my aim and research questions.

In the next chapter I will describe my research design, approach, research methods and analysis. I will discuss decisions I took that characterised my research, difficulties I experienced in the field and reflect on my role as a researcher. Finally, I will introduce and briefly describe my research participants.

2 Methods

This chapter describes the approach, research design and methods I used to study small-scale chicken keeping culture in Britain. After the general description of my research approach and design, I will describe how and in which context I used each method and which issues and difficulties I experienced in the field. Finally, I provide a description of my role as a researcher and some reflexive comments on that role.

2.1 Research design

I adopted a social anthropological, ethnographic approach for my study of the small-scale chicken keeping culture and the human-chicken relationship in this context. An in-depth ethnographic approach, which would yield rich, in-depth, information about this culture is the most appropriate method to open up this field of inquiry. The ethnographic approach allows the researcher to fully immerse him/herself in the culture they study, taking part in the same activities and patterns and fully develop an understanding from the inside (Hine 2015). Brewer (2000, 11) defines the ethnographic approach as:

not one particular method of data collection but a style of research that is distinguished by its objectives, which are to understand the social meanings and activities of people in a given 'field' or setting, and its approach, which involves close association with, and often participation in this setting.

Ethnography allows for the exploration of a culture without a clear thesis to be tested or strict research questions to be answered. It allowed me to capture the nature of the relationships chicken keepers have to their chickens. I chose a multi-sited ethnographic

approach as described by Marcus (1998) as the practise of chicken keeping and the human-chicken relationships in these settings take place across multiple sites which I needed to consider. Marcus (1998) argued that it is not enough to study a single site and to put it in relevant contexts. He stated that it is necessary to study complex cultural phenomena in a way that captures the historical, cultural, ecological and political contexts as an inherent and embedded part of the phenomena itself (Marcus 1998), which is achieved by studying multiple sites in which these cultural phenomena take place. As part of the multi-sited approach, I used several qualitative research methods that I will discuss below in more detail. An essential part of my project was my role as participant observer, and observing participant on occasions, engaging with small-scale chicken keepers, the use of semi-structured interviews, of virtual ethnographic field methods, and the use of information from text documents.

The virtual space is, as described in the Introduction, an important aspect of the contemporary chicken keeping culture and therefore represents one of the sites which I chose to focus on. Cultural phenomena related to the Internet and social online communities increasingly gained importance over the last decade and the virtual space has been acknowledged as an important site that needs to be taken seriously (Wittel 2000; Hine 2000; Kendall 2002; Boellstorff et al. 2012). One difficulty that could arise according to Wittel (2000) is that the exclusive investigation of virtual sites, could lead to ignoring and omitting important clues of the material world. Both have to be considered, as it is the case in this multi-sited ethnography and has been done in this thesis.

Following the perspectives of Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2006 and Thornberg & Charmaz 2014)), which I consider to be a natural extension of the

ethnographic approach, the insights and information I gained with these methods were simultaneously analysed in form of reflections in my research diary (both in notebooks and on my laptop). I frequently used concept maps, Mendeley, and Nvivo, a qualitative data analysis tool, to identify themes, concepts and connections between them (see Figure 4 further below in this chapter for an example of a mind-map I created with NVivo). The approach towards the analysis and interpretation of the ethnographic material with the Grounded Theory will be described in a later section in this chapter.

2.2 Access – first steps

Given that my the focus of my project was on the activities of small-scale chicken keepers, the essential first step that marked the beginning of my time in the field was to establish first contacts with people who keep chickens. During the first few months as a PhD student I identified that the Internet played a crucial role for small-scale chicken keepers today for talking to each other, exchanging information about chickens and chicken keeping and as a means to learn more about chicken keeping through blogs, newspaper articles published online and through instructional videos on YouTube. Facebook played an important role as means for communication between chicken keepers, and I decided to join several Facebook groups dedicated to discussing and exchanging information about chicken keeping.

Joining these groups in the first few months of my research project provided me with the opportunity to immerse myself in the culture of small-scale chicken keepers online and to make first contact with the people I planned to study. After asking several Facebook group administrators for permission, I posted a call for participants with two different Facebook

groups. I selected these Facebook groups for their differing implied attitudes towards chickens (I will describe these Facebook groups in more detail in chapter 4).

As I adopted an overt role as a researcher, the call for participants explained that this research was conducted as part of a doctoral research project and that I was looking for chicken keepers who were interested in talking about their personal experiences with chicken keeping. Those who were interested in participating were requested to send me a private message via Facebook. After an initial conversation via private Facebook messages I usually inquired whether they were comfortable with talking on the phone, meeting up for a face-to-face conversation, or with me visiting them in their homes for a few hours so I could meet their chickens and see their chicken keeping setup. This first engagement with chicken keepers on Facebook was part of my virtual ethnography, but also represented the stepping-stone for the phases of participant observation and semi-structured interviews. I will explain, in a section below, how I conducted the virtual ethnography.

As required by the University, I submitted my research proposal for a full ethics and health and safety review. Approval was given. A central ethics concern was to ensure the anonymity of the people with whom I conducted my research and to protect them from any potential harm. During my research I was permitted to take photographs in private settings and I also took photographs in public events such as poultry shows. In the thesis I did not make use of photographs, from private settings, in which individuals could be identified. In the submitted I included photographs of people at poultry shows, in which individuals could be identified. Following discussions at the PhD interview, I decided to

remove these because, despite them being taken in a public event, I did not have explicit permission from those people captured in the photographs.

2.3 Volunteering at city farms

During this initial engagement phase, I started to volunteer at two London city farms. A city farm is a place in an urban environment where usually non-profit organisations keep animals. They keep animals traditionally considered as pets (such as guinea pigs, ferrets and rabbits) and farm animals or livestock (cows, pigs, goats and poultry) for the benefit of the urban population. Usually they have a set of educational and volunteer programmes specifically targeted at children and local urban communities. Their goal is to provide the urban population with the opportunity to learn about agriculture, sustainability and the environment and to interact with farm and smaller animals. City farms depend on the help of volunteers for the everyday care of the animal and maintenance of the farm.

I believed that volunteering at city farms would give me the opportunity to engage, on a regular basis, with chickens and people who had expertise in chicken keeping. Also, I was keen to learn more about chicken keeping as preparation for the interviews and conversations with small-scale chicken keepers. I learned to distinguish between breeds, to use specialised terms that chicken keepers use and I had the opportunity to talk with farmyard volunteers and farmyard managers about their experiences with taking care of chickens. I also saw this as a great opportunity for identifying small-scale chicken keepers through the network of farmyard volunteers.

The volunteer programmes enabled me to spend time at city farms without being perceived as an intruder and potentially altering the behaviour of people towards animals. I worked at two different city farms on a weekly basis for six months between June and November 2014. I worked alongside other volunteers and helped to care for the chickens and other animals. Our tasks primarily included mucking out the stables and cages, feeding animals and helping with the visitors at the farm. During breaks, and before and after my assigned shifts as volunteer, I spent time at the chicken enclosures to observe how visitors interacted with the chickens or talking to other volunteers and the farmyard managers. The farmyard managers of city farms taught me about how to pick up and handle chickens and about the general requirements and care of chickens. Furthermore, on two occasions I was involved in incubation projects led by a farmyard manager, which included visiting primary schools with incubators and talking about the chicks' development in the eggs. Part of this project involved leaving the incubator with fertile eggs in the classroom and to enable children to see the eggs hatch and take care of the chicks.

2.4 Visiting chicken keepers

While volunteering at city farms, I was continuously looking to recruit chicken keepers who I could talk to and possibly visit for the methods of participant observation and interviews (more about the interviews below). While some chicken keepers were visited several times (I visited three chicken keepers twice and one chicken keeper four times), most of them were visited only on one occasion.

My research diary became an essential instrument for my ethnography and I took field notes during my field visits but also when reflecting about the visits and developing ideas at home. During the field visits I took field notes about the environment the people lived in and in which the chickens were kept. I recorded the type of breeds and numbers of chickens, which were kept and details about their previous chickens. I took notes on peculiarities and things I noticed, for example special terms and words they used and how they talked to the hens (e.g. whether they called their hens, girls, babies, birds, chickens or ladies). Before each visit I usually prepared questions that I found interesting or useful, from the experience of previous interviews and field visits. I usually prepared a mix of basic questions, which mainly remained unchanged (e.g. when and why did you start with keeping chickens? Which breeds and why?), and some questions that I found were especially interesting about a specific chicken keeper (e.g. combining gardening with chickens and composting chicken faeces) (see Appendix 10.4 for a selection of questions which I used).

One-off visits to chicken keepers' homes followed a pattern. I arrived and after a few minutes of small talk I was usually invited to see the chickens. The chicken keepers then showed me their garden or backyard and introduced me to their chickens. On some occasions, I took my research diary with me on the tour through the garden and chickens, but I felt it was quite distracting and difficult to take notes while walking and talking. I therefore either decided to take quick notes after the tour through the garden for a few minutes, or later by voice recording conversations during these tours. During the tours through their garden I asked them to talk about their gardening activities, or things I noticed when seeing their chickens (e.g. the chicken house, broody hens, and

relationships between the hens). I was often told anecdotes about their chickens and I got the chance to see them touch and interact with their chickens for a few minutes.

After some time with the chickens in the garden, I was usually offered a cup of tea and invited to sit down inside their homes, while they made the tea. This gave me the opportunity to have a look around inside their kitchens and living rooms (after explicitly asking for permission), where I would often spot objects depicting or featuring chickens, or objects with a purpose related to chicken keeping (e.g. cups with the drawing of a chicken, egg cups, drawing of chickens or chicken figures). Furthermore, this small break usually provided me with the opportunity to open my research diary, take quick notes and then go through and adjust the questions I had previously prepared for the visit, before starting the semi-structured interview phase of my visit.

Once we sat down and I was equipped with my research diary, and at times with a voice recorder, I went through the questions and took notes. As my interview approach was semi-structured, I allowed the conversation to drift into different directions rather than follow pre-defined rigid flow, which enabled me to explore new ideas and aspects of my research. After the interview phase, I either asked for permission to take some photographs of the objects, garden and chickens or asked them to show me some of the books or other sources they owned and used to learn about chicken keeping.

I generally felt it was frustrating to not have the opportunity to study the activities of chicken keepers by observing their daily routine and the interactions they had with the chickens. On my day visits, which usually lasted between two and five hours, I felt that I needed to keep the conversation alive, even though I would have much preferred to

simply become the 'fly on the wall'. I was studying an activity that people performed at their homes in private, often only for a few minutes every day and therefore I was not able to simply sit in a corner, observe and make entries in my research diary. I sought for an arrangement that would permit me to stay with chicken keepers, while at the same time not being perceived as intruder.

2.5 Staying with chicken keepers

I was worried that day visits only allowed me to explore the chicken keeping culture from a superficial perspective. I was interested in exploring the culture not only by interviewing study participants, but also by spending more time in chicken keepers' homes. By spending several days at a time with them I believed I would be able to discover patterns and aspects of the chicken keeping culture that I could not capture through one-off visits.

A friend told me about a website offering a service connecting people who needed help on their smallholdings or with their gardens with people offering their help in exchange for food and accommodation. I registered on this online portal, HelpX, and created a profile, stating that I am happy to help smallholders or anybody else keeping chickens with gardening, mucking out and simple DIY tasks. I also explained that I am doing a research project and that this was the reason for my interest in volunteering on HelpX⁷. I found four smallholdings and community farms located in rural England, which I stayed at for between a weekend and two weeks at a time. I helped them with gardening, mucking out, harvesting, pruning trees, and numerous other small tasks. While at times I still felt like an intruder, I perceived it as an extremely useful experience to stay with chicken keepers

⁷ <http://www.helpx.net/> [accessed on 15th April 2018]

for an extended period of time and I felt the experiences gained complemented the interviews that I had with them. I observed the daily patterns of caring for the chickens and I learned about the chickens' behaviour and social structure, all of which provided me the opportunity to talk with the chicken keepers about their experiences with their chickens in an informal way without the pressure of keeping the conversation alive. During my stays with smallholder chicken keepers, which were all located in rural areas in England, I also met and interviewed several neighbours who were chicken keepers, which enabled me to observe chicken keepers talking to each other about chickens without my interference.

On two of these longer stays, I participated in chicken keeping courses that were offered by the smallholders I lodged with. One of these courses was focused on teaching the essentials of chicken keeping to novice chicken keepers, whereas the second one was focused on teaching about slaughtering and preparing chickens for human consumption. I took part in one other course for novices during a day visit at a chicken keeper. These courses allowed me to gather useful material on how chickens are perceived by the course participants, but especially gave me an interesting perspective about how chicken keeping is presented by an expert chicken keeper to novices.

2.6 Semi-structured interviews

Most of the interviews were conducted during visits of chicken keepers, as described above. I conducted 36 semi-structured interviews, not counting informal and shorter conversations with chicken keepers who I encountered during my daily life or who I visited. Formal interview length varied according to location and format. Formal

interviews during my visits of chicken keepers lasted between 30 minutes and two hours, interviews on the phone or at cafés lasted between 15 minutes to 1 hour. I audio-recorded 11 interviews and fully or partially transcribed them (I took additionally light notes in my research diary of the audio-recorded interviews). In my partial transcriptions, I paraphrased sentences and summarised statements interviewees made. These transcriptions also contained word-by-word quotes (not including pauses or other non-verbal features) of passages which I considered especially important and which I wanted to quote in the final thesis. An example of a partial transcript is the following excerpt:

She had to get the hatching eggs from a breeder this time because the fox killed all of her chickens. Usually she would have her own hatching eggs for each year. But around the third year she would buy some hatching eggs in, because the cockerels will be related to most hens by then. “I never hatched chicks with bad legs or blind ones”.

The following excerpt was taken from an interview which I transcribed word-by-word, not transcribing pauses or non-verbal features:

Me: Do you talk to others, like friends or neighbours about your chickens?

Interviewee: I try not to, because I don't want to be a chicken bore. I don't really talk to others. My sister in law she sometimes would tell me about hers...she has full-sized chickens, and sometimes when she wouldn't clip their wings they get out and then the local children would bring them back. And usually she would tell us a story about them breaking out again. And I don't tend to mention them much,

because probably because most of my friends haven't got them and they probably wouldn't quite get it and I don't think people understand what a good pet they are either. They just think it's a bird and it's nothing.

For the majority of interviews, especially at the beginning of my research and later when I felt that recording the conversation was less appropriate, or when the participant did not consent to being recorded, I relied exclusively on detailed notes kept in my research diary and on contextual notes I made after the interviews, at times in the research diary, but often electronically. Accounts of conversations captured electronically resulted in more detailed descriptions, as I was quicker typing on a keyboard, making it easier for me and more fluid to follow my train of thoughts.

After several months of fieldwork, I felt it was important to find interviewees with a good understanding and overview of the activities of chicken keepers and the recent developments and trend of chicken keeping. I chose to talk to a journalist and book author Andy Cawthray, who specialized in writing about chicken keeping. Furthermore I interviewed the founder of the Hen Keeping Association of the UK, Francine Raymond, (who also writes books/articles about chicken keeping). I also chose to interview two employees at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), who were part of the smallholder working group at DEFRA and who showed an interest in the activities of small-scale chicken keepers.

2.7 Socio-economic characteristics of respondents and interviewees

All research subjects, whom I observed, interviewed, and stayed with were based in the UK and almost exclusively in England (two interviewees were based in Wales the rest in England). Two thirds (25) were female and one third was male (11). I estimated my interviewees ages and classified all of them in three age categories: 36% were between 20-39 years (13), 44% between 40-60 years (16), and 20% of all participants (7) were classified as above the age of 60. The people I interviewed face-to-face and the respondents I visited were mostly White British, with the exceptions of two respondents who were of White ethnicity but who originated from other European countries and one respondent from South-America. Most chicken keepers either lived in urban or suburban environments (22), and a little more than a third was based in environments, which I would classify as rural.

This thesis refers to urban, suburban and rural environments. While I offer definitions and perspectives on the concepts 'rurality' and 'rural' in the Introduction (especially as conceptualised by Woods 2005), I did not attempt my own definitions of the terms 'urban' and 'suburban'. As with the term 'rural', academics have struggled to find clear definitions of the urban and the suburban (Ceccato 2016). Often rural and urban is used as binary classification (such as in the rural/urban classification used in a government document published by DEFRA 2013). I use the term 'urban' as defined by DEFRA (2013,4) as "settlements with a population of 10,000 or more" as guidance. I chose to include the category suburban, which Hinchcliffe (2005, 899) states has been widely defined "as the residential skirt around a recognizable urban area [...] largely, though not entirely, residential in its character."

During my visits it became apparent that most of my respondents led a comfortable existence, having houses with gardens. The chicken keepers I visited at their homes belonged mostly to the English middle class.

2.8 Growhampton and Autoethnography

During the planning phase of my research project, I did not anticipate having the opportunity to become a chicken keeper myself. Living in central London made it challenging to locate the required outdoor space and permit to keep chickens. This is why I initially decided to gather my practical skills and knowledge, the participatory aspect of the role as ethnographer, by helping chicken keepers I visited with the care of their chickens. But a few months into my PhD I was given the opportunity to keep chickens on the university grounds through collaboration with Growhampton, a University of Roehampton Student Union led sustainability initiative. Keeping chickens was part of Growhampton's initial proposal. We agreed that Teresa (Growhampton project manager) and to a lesser degree Joel (Growhampton growing project officer), would be in charge of the chicken project and the care of the chickens. In practice I was responsible for the daily care of the chickens and the recruitment and management of a group of volunteers who also cared for the chickens. Teresa and I often took important decisions together and regularly chatted about the chickens, shared jokes and discussed novel experiences and issues related to the chickens. The process of planning to get the chickens and taking care of them and the rich and diverse experiences we gained as chicken keepers were important aspects of my ethnography. Furthermore, the regular interactions with experts who were asked for advice, and the volunteers who helped us take care of them, were

important aspects of the multi-sited ethnographic approach and provide material especially for chapter 5.

It is important to acknowledge the autoethnographic dimension of this site of my study of small-scale chicken keepers. While “all ethnographic work implies a degree of personal engagement with the field [...] Autoethnography is [...] grounded in an explicit recognition of those biographical and personal foundations” (Atkinson 2006, 402). The explicit experiences of the ethnographer and reflections are written in and personal experience is used to illustrate cultural experience (Holman Jones et al. 2016).

The Growhampton chicken keeping project is not offered as a representative case study of a typical small-scale chicken keeping setting. A chicken keeping study at an educational institution, in collaboration with student union staff, and with the help and engagement of student, staff and local community volunteers, is not representative of the experiences of small-scale chicken keepers in private and domestic settings. I never intended to become a chicken keeper, a representative of the culture I studied, nor did I have the ambition to ‘represent’ or ‘speak for’ all small-scale chicken keepers (Holman Jones et al. 2016) through my participation and engagement in this project. Rather, this in part autoethnographic site allowed me to experience and to participate in the practices of chicken keeping and permitted me to interact with, and learn more about, chickens. The learning and enskilment process and the frequent reflections on the wellbeing of, and issues related to chickens, with Teresa, Joel and the chicken keeping volunteers are the basis of chapter 5, where I will also provide more detail about the Growhampton chicken project.

2.9 Virtual ethnography

Another aspect of my ethnographic research was to engage with virtual sites, where activities of small-scale chicken keepers take place. As previously mentioned, the virtual space is an important part of today's chicken keeping world. Hine (2015, 14) coined the helpful term 'embedded Internet', which is the Internet of everyday life. Hine's research treats the Internet not as separate, detached site or instrument, but rather as an integral part of our time, central to everyday communication and activities. Therefore in the study of chicken keepers I did not treat the virtual space as a completely separate research site, but I remained aware of and could show the embeddedness of Internet in the activities of chicken keepers today (see chapter 4).

I drew the material for my virtual ethnography from several chicken related commercial sites, such as omlet.co.uk, the website of a company specialised in offering products such as housing, toys, and treats for small-scale chicken keepers. More importantly I based my virtual ethnography on the observations of discussion and social networking forums such as Facebook, where I joined four popular groups with a focus on UK small-scale chicken keeping. I regularly explored the content of several blogs and online newspaper columns dedicated to the topic and the comment sections and discussion boards that were often on the bottom of blog entries and newspaper entries. In Table 1 I list the most important websites, which provided me with material for my virtual ethnography.

Table 1 List of major websites of websites which were part of the virtual ethnography

Name	Description	Web location
Omlet	Commercial website which offers products produced by Omlet focusing on the small-scale chicken keeping market (and more recently also on other pet animals such as Guinea pigs and rabbits).	omlet.co.uk
Ebay	Commercial website specialised on selling and buying including auctioning. Useful for my study of the material culture of chicken keeping and of interest for the practicalities related to the Growhampton project (e.g. getting fertile eggs).	ebay.co.uk
Chicken Street	Blog by Andy Cawthray – chicken breeder/keeper and writer. This site contains interesting opinion pieces on diverse chicken keeping related topics. The comment sections allows chicken keepers to voice their personal opinions, experiences and provides them with a space to discuss these issues.	thechickenstreet.wordpress.com/
Keeping Chickens UK	An anonymous chicken keeper blog, which provides a basic chicken-keeping guide on diverse topics and issues. This blog also has a space for comments.	keeping-chickens.me.uk
Preloved	Commercial website offering a platform for selling and buying used items (and animals). This site was useful to explore the material culture of chicken keeping.	preloved.co.uk
Facebook	Social networking platform with numerous groups focusing on chicken keeping in the UK.	facebook.com
YouTube	Chicken keepers and commercial organisations use YouTube to show and explain different aspects of chicken keeping (such as ‘how to hold a chicken’ and ‘choosing the right feeder’).	youtube.com
Gumtree	Commercial website offering a platform for selling and buying used items (and animals). This site was useful to explore the material culture of chicken keeping.	gumtree.com
Newspaper comment sections	The comment sections of popular newspaper websites such as The Guardian or The Daily Mail offered me an opportunity to listen in on conversations between chicken keepers and explore their opinions and attitudes.	N/A

Savin-Baden and Tombs (2017) described three methods for conducting research in the digital world, online observation being one of them. The online observation aspect of my virtual ethnography of the Facebook groups and blogs I chose, follows their approach. I adopted the role of an online passive participator, which meant that “the researcher has only minimal involvement, for example, by small and discrete intervention in discussion forums or being present, but saying and doing little [...] the researcher operates as a bystander and observes in a detached way, rather than engaging with what is taking place” (2017, paragraph 14.115).

A useful way to understand the geography of the digital space is to think of it in public and private spheres (Rosenberg 2010; Hine 2015; Savin-Baden 2017). This binary form of the digital space becomes useful when we, as researchers, need to ask questions about research ethics, privacy and of course the lack of participant consent. The public sphere is defined as a space that is accessible to anyone, while the private sphere is considered to be accessible and visible to particular individuals only.

In a similar way to Hine (2015) and Koene et al. (2015), I chose to adapt my approach on an on-going basis, while conducting my virtual ethnography. When browsing through articles and blog entries that would be considered to be part of the public sphere, as previously defined, and available to anyone with an Internet connection, I could quote blog entries, articles and comments. In these cases, I used direct quotes only after careful consideration of the possible consequences for the authors. I only used direct quotes when the authors used a pseudonym that protected their identity in their original comment.

The semi-private nature of Facebook creates several ethical dilemmas that I have to address at this point. To view content on Facebook, people need to register with Facebook with their full name. Facebook users can restrict the information they allow other Facebook users to see (public information) and information that they restrict others to see (private). Not all users are aware about the privacy settings of Facebook (Bauman 2013) and information that is publicly available on Facebook needs to be used by researchers with caution. Similarly, some Facebook groups (discussion boards) require the permission of a group moderator to join. Material in form of posts and conversations in these groups need to be considered semi-private. The consent to observe these communities has not been obtained due to the nature of my virtual ethnography. Koene et al. (2015) acknowledged the ethical grey zone of conducting qualitative research of social media communication on Facebook. They accept however, that qualitative research that focuses on “establishing general trends in behaviour, or fundamental patterns of communication which are used to establish or test general theories, not [to] criticize or manipulate individual social media users” (Koene et al. 2015, 635) are ethical even without explicit consent by users of the studied social networking group.

Another issue, which arises from the virtual ethnography, is the difficulty of separating the global chicken-keeping phenomenon from the British phenomenon. Especially on social media groups, but also in media coverage, the American and the British phenomenon and discourses related to chicken keeping are mixed, making it often difficult to identify clear differences. An example of this can be seen in a newspaper article published by *The Guardian online* with the title ‘Pet swap: are chickens really the new dogs: No longer content to keep poultry as merely egg suppliers, the UK is embracing them as pets, with names and roaming rights’ (Usborne 2017). The author mentions a chicken

keeper who started to name their chickens: “It was a shock to me when I started giving them names”. This quote was however by an American chicken keeper, a fact that was also heavily criticised in a comment below the article by a chicken keeper who believed that British keepers would never be shocked by naming their chickens. Most importantly however, I experienced difficulties with separating the American (and sometimes Australian) from the British phenomenon in the social interactions I observed online between chicken keepers who used social networking sites or blogs such as described above. Chicken keepers, for example, referred to American regulations and terms, which were sometimes adopted and started to be used by British chicken keepers, such as ‘Easter Eggers’ to describe chickens who lay blue or greenish eggs. Aware of this mix of culture and attitudes I tried to separate terms and practices of British chicken keepers as much as possible from the American chicken keeping culture. I chose to exclude popular chicken keeping online blogs such as Backyardchickens.com, which appeared to be primarily used by American chicken keepers, but were also popular with British chicken keepers. Instead I chose to focus on social media groups, blogs and discussion forums which were created by British chicken keepers or which contained ‘UK’ or ‘Britain’ in their group name or title.

In chapter 4 I will continue to engage with the multiple sites of the virtual ethnography and describe the diverse tools and areas online chicken keepers use for their activities. The virtual ethnography will also be highlighted in chapters 3, 5 and 7.

2.10 Written documents

As part of my ethnographic research approach I relied on published and unpublished written documents. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, 122) noted that “ethnographers need to take account of documents as part of the social setting under investigation. Indeed these documents may play a central role in the activities taking place”. Due to the recent popularity of chicken keeping in the UK, numerous books and newspaper articles have been published by and about chicken keepers. A careful consideration of the written documents is important. In the following sections I will present the written documents I used for my project.

2.10.1 Newspapers and Magazines

I collected, printed, and analysed articles from selected newspapers which published articles about chicken keeping online between 2007 and 2017. I selected newspapers according to their circulation numbers in June 2014 and their availability of freely accessible online archives. I included following newspapers in my analysis: *The Daily Mail*, *The Telegraph*, *The Guardian* and *The Independent*.

I entered the keywords ‘chicken keeping’, ‘chicken keeper’, ‘hens’, and ‘chickens’ in the search engines of the newspaper archives. Where possible I used the exact phrase search option opposed to the ‘any keyword’ variant of the keywords. I only collected relevant on-topic articles, for example I excluded articles, which only mentioned chicken as meat and cooking instructions unrelated to the activities of small-scale chicken keepers. As shown in detail in Table 2 (in the Appendix), between 2007 until April 2017 there were 127 articles published online about chicken keeping, which were considered in my analysis.

I identified and documented several reoccurring themes, which were discussed by the authors of these articles (see also Appendix 10.2 for the list of articles). Broadly, three types of articles related to chicken keeping were published:

1) About the trend of chicken keeping. These articles were either:

- a. Factual, providing information about chicken keepers and the characteristics of new wave of chicken keepers, e.g. 'Back to the Good Life: thousands take up chicken ownership' or 'B&Q taps into the 'Good Life' with extensive garden farmyard range' (Wallop 2009; Tozer 2009).
- b. Argumentative: Critical/positive about small-scale chicken keeping in the UK e.g. 'Why a chicken might be the perfect pet for you' or 'Think living the Good Life will cut your food bills? Don't count your chickens' (Dickinson 2015; Stocks 2010).
- c. Speculative: Exploring motivations of chicken keepers to pursue this activity, e.g. 'Why are we all keeping hens?' (Hickman 2011) or 'The eggs factor: how the middle class fell in love with chickens.' (Barr 2012)

2) Personal experiences: Anecdotes by chicken keepers, e.g. Cockerel ate diamond ring by Williams (Williams 2013) or 'Outfoxed! How my husband agreed to go 'al fresco' to save our hens from foxes' (Shooter 2008).

- 3) Practical advice on chicken keeping (e.g. the regular newspaper column by Andy Cawthray 2012/13 for *The Guardian Online* or by Francine Raymond of *The Telegraph Online* in 2010).

Table 2 Newspaper articles about chicken keeping published online by academic year

Newspaper	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Total
Daily Mail	1	3	2	5	3	2	6	1	3	2	1	29
The Guardian		2	2	2	2	11	9	2	3	8	5	46
The Independent	1	1	1	2	1	1	1				1	9
The Telegraph	2	4	6	9	5	4	4	5	1	2	1	43
Total	4	10	11	18	11	18	20	8	7	12	8	127

I subscribed to the monthly *Your Chickens* magazine for one year. The target group of the magazine is predominantly small-scale chicken keepers without a commercial or pedigree breeding focus. *Your Chickens* usually features experience essays of chicken keepers, tips and advice columns by experts, articles about certain aspects of chicken keeping, such as about characteristics of certain chicken breeds and contests and competitions such as a chicken house design contest.

2.10.2 Documents by chicken keepers

Another category of published print media, which I considered in my ethnography were books about chicken keeping. Books containing practical advice and experiences about chicken keeping by British small-scale chicken keepers (Hollander 2010; Baldwin 2012; Hinkinson 2013; Roberts 2013) were especially interesting, as they could reveal details about their relationships to their chickens and differences in their approaches.

I also examined three unpublished manuals written by small-scale chicken keepers on how to keep chickens. Chicken keepers who offered small-scale chicken keeping courses for

beginners often create chicken keeping manuals containing the basics (according to the chicken keepers) of caring for chickens for their course participants.

2.11 Analysis and Interpretation

The Grounded Theory approach, first coined by Glaser and Strauss (1967) was a useful orientation and analytic approach for the analysis and interpretation of the material I collected; although my collection of qualitative material was not based directly on it. This inductive approach enables researchers to produce new theoretical perspectives and concepts which derive from collected material (Strauss & Corbin 1998). I opted to adapt elements of Grounded Theory for the analysis and interpretation as my project is of exploratory nature, adopting an ethnographic approach.

Rather than simply adopting a Grounded Theory approach, I made use of, and integrated, elements of it. I began the analysis and interpretation of my ethnographic material early on, starting to “separate, sort, and synthesize these data through qualitative coding” (Charmaz 2006, 3). I used qualitative coding, the attachment of labels, at all stages: for the review of relevant literature, later when examining news, magazine articles and blog and discussion forum entries (at times by taking screenshots and other times by referring to it in my research diary), and especially in my research diaries and interview transcripts (both digitally and on paper).

According to Charmaz’s (2006) Grounded Theory approach, the coding process consist of two stages of coding: initial coding and focused coding. In order to code the data and to look at the phrases, text passages and research entries critically, I used guiding questions

as defined by Charmaz (2006): “What do the actions and statements in the data take for granted?”, “What process(es) is at issue here? How can I define it?”, “How does the research participant(s) act and profess to think and feel while involved in this process?”, “What might his or her observed behaviour indicate?” (2006, 51). Rather than simply follow the rather prescriptive suggestions of Charmaz (2006) my coding approach did not consist of two separate stages of coding as described above. My coding stage was informed by my fieldwork experiences, my use of mind maps and the summaries, definitions and questions that I regularly noted in my research diary. Through these preliminary analytic tools, I was able to create focused codes that allowed me to advance the qualitative analysis of interview transcripts and excerpts, notes, and other documents. In summary, the perspectives of Grounded Theory helped in orientating my research and helped me to be systematic in my analyses.

Codes were attached to text passages by either handwriting the reference to a theme or concept next to a text section or paragraph, or by using NVivo and Mendeley software tools. NVivo is a qualitative data analysis software which I used primarily in the first year of my research project and Mendeley is a reference manager with additional functions for qualitative coding. NVivo and Mendeley enabled me to highlight, comment, and create labels for text I entered and saved in these applications. These highlighted sections, comments, and labels lead to the creation of preliminary analytic ideas and categories, which I subsequently used to think with and challenge new material. These ideas and categories helped me to add depth to the interviews and conversations I had with chicken keepers. For example, as I became aware of the tension between peoples’ emotional attachment towards individual chickens contrasting with their regular consumption of chicken eggs and meat, I started to ask chicken keepers whether they ate chicken meat

generally, and whether they ate their own chickens and eggs. This question especially helped me to develop my argument highlighted in chapter 7.

Frequent summaries, comparisons, and synthesis especially in my research diaries throughout the periods of fieldwork, but also later during the writing up phases, helped me to develop and produce theories about the small-scale chicken keeping culture. NVivo also provided me with the option to create concept maps, which helped me to better understand connections and relationships between themes and concepts of importance, which I identified in course of my research study.

Figure 4 shows an example of a small section of a concept map, which I created during the time in the field and which helped me to order emerging themes. The continuous analysis of the material I collected enabled me to adapt the direction of the interviews and guided my participant observation both online and offline.

2.12 Reflexivity and researcher's role

In the following paragraphs I will address my role as a researcher and the assumptions, expectations, and experiences that influenced my work, representing possible biases. Reflexivity is an essential part of social anthropological research, especially for the interpretation of the results and as a productive element of the writing up process. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, 17) have addressed the importance of reflexivity in social research and note that through participation we cannot “avoid having an effect on the social phenomena we study. In other words, there is no way in which we can escape the social world in order to study it.” Furthermore, according to Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) reflections on the role of the researcher in the field and the research process in terms of the acknowledgement of possible biases do not undermine but rather strengthen qualitative research. My personal prior experiences, beliefs, and positions shaped how I was perceived and how I interacted with my research participants and respondents, but also how I perceived and interpreted the material I collected. It would therefore be problematic to pretend that the material collected and analysed was an objective reflection of reality, disconnected from my person.

In this thesis, especially in the last two chapters I discussed the background my informants and interviewees grew up in – rural, suburban or urban, on smallholdings, village or in a town. I therefore believe it is important to describe the circumstances in which I grew up. I grew up in a small town in Austria on the Danube, surrounded by agricultural fields and smaller villages dominated by farming communities. My family runs a small flower business and my father grows flowers in several glasshouses built in the 1960s. As a child I spent a significant portion of my time exploring the flower nursery and nearby woods,

growing up experiencing both urban and rural settings in my daily life. My father's family kept chickens when he grew up and he often shared amusing stories about their chickens with me. When I was eight years old, my father spontaneously allowed me to bring home two small Bantam chicks from a local farm store and chicken breeder. We kept chickens for one year, let the hen and the cockerel hatch and raise some chicks, but finally lost them to a fox. My rural/urban background, including my short experiences with chickens as a child, contributed to my ease in approaching small-scale chicken keepers, who I could often relate to without difficulty. I have an affinity towards chickens due to these prior experiences, which lead me to not only perceive them as producers of meat and eggs, but also as animals who could be kept as pets.

Staying with the notion of chickens as productive animals, I must also state my position towards industrial animal farming. I consume animal products regularly, but try to avoid eating meat frequently as I believe the daily consumption of meat is unsustainable and leads to the mistreatment and exploitation of animals. When I consume meat, eggs, or milk, I am conscious of the exploited animals behind these products. I welcome that some chicken keepers gained new awareness and appreciation related to animal welfare and ethics through their activities, such as the statement of a chicken keeper who said that they came to realise that for each KFC chicken fillet, a live chicken had to die.

An important aspect of my role as a researcher is the fact that I am not British and that my mother tongue is not English. To some extent this meant that I approached my study of the small-scale chicken keeping culture in Britain from an outsider perspective. This comes with advantages and disadvantages. As an outsider I was not always aware of the cultural fine lines, for example in connection to privacy at home. Possibly due to my

insecurities as a foreigner, at times, I felt an intruder into people's private spaces, not being sure how much hospitality on their side was appropriate to accept and whether I overstayed my welcome. Because of this insecurity I was somewhat hesitant at times to audio-record interviews in the early days of my fieldwork. At times when I did not audio-record interviews, however, I felt that the keepers revealed more about themselves and their activities, such as a keeper who admitted that they fed at times leftover chicken meat to her chickens.

Having spent only a few years in London, I am aware of, but presumably to some extent blind to, the subtle clues and signals which compose the English social class system (such as language and terms used by participants). I therefore did not approach research participants with prejudices, which could be associated with social classes, but on the other hand I felt that I might have approached the conversations and subsequently the interpretation of the ethnographic material with a lack of subtlety and sensitivity towards the significance of social classes.

As non-British, I ran less danger of 'going native' (O'Reilly 2009) and was able to consider my research from more distance. For example, throughout my research project I became slowly familiar with chicken-related jokes ("Why did the chicken cross the road?"), stories, and terms, and rather than taking them for granted, my outsider perspective allowed me to see these chicken-related cultural aspects.

In sum, these positions and opinions influenced how I approached this topic, yet I was fully aware and acknowledged these biases during the interpretation and the writing up phases of my research, which, I believe, improved the quality of this research project.

2.13 List of research participants

To protect the anonymity of my research subjects I changed all names to pseudonyms and did not provide details about the locations of their homes, except where noted otherwise.

Alice is a retired schoolteacher in her 60s who lives in a residential area in urban England with her husband. She keeps two bantam hens in her garden and one dog. She has been keeping hens for around 15 years. I visited her and after she showed me her chickens I formally interviewed her.

Amy is in her 30s and lives with her two young children and husband in Greater London and she keeps 21 hens in her garden. She quit her office job a few years ago, and created a small business based on her interest in food sustainability and self-sufficiency. She teaches classes for people who would like to learn how to grow vegetables, to make bread, about food preservation and how to keep bees and chickens. I visited and interviewed Amy only once.

Andy Cawthray (this is his real name) is a chicken keeper and breeder, a journalist and writer who specialised in writing about chicken keeping in newspapers (especially *The Guardian*) and magazines (such as the *Your Chickens* magazine). I followed Andy's blog 'Chicken Street' online and I interviewed him over the phone and continued to exchange ideas and discuss things over email.

Anna is in her 40s and lives with her two young children and husband in a residential area in urban England. She has been keeping chickens for more than five years.

Bob is in his early 50s. I met him through an acquaintance coincidentally and briefly interviewed him about his experiences as a chicken keeper. He keeps four hens in his garden.

Catherine lives in rural England, not far from Dora, with her husband, and has been keeping chickens for more than five years. Catherine is in her 50s and has two children and grandchildren who don't live with her. I visited and interviewed Catherine on two different occasions and the second she had nine chickens (including two cockerels).

Darren is in his 50s and has been living on a community smallholding in rural England for 20 years. I interviewed Darren when I stayed on the farm for one week and when I helped with work in the garden and with the chickens. The community farm keeps a cockerel and several hens.

Dora is a small-scale chicken keeper and breeder in her mid-50s who lives with her husband in rural England. Her parents and grandparents also kept chickens and she has been keeping chickens for more than 20 years. I spent an afternoon with her and she introduced me to Catherine. When I visited her she kept four chickens (including one cockerel).

Ed is in his 40s and is like Harry (below) a part of a group of people who plan to create a city farm in Greater London. Ed currently keeps chickens at his home. He has two small children and keeps more than three chickens.

Ellie is in her 40s and is Jill's neighbour. She has been keeping chickens for three years. She lives with her husband and two young children in a residential area in rural England. I visited and interviewed her formally on one occasion. Ellie has four hens.

Emily is in her late 20s/early 30s and lives in a suburban area in England. She started keeping chickens less than two years ago and keeps three hens. I met her in a café in London and interviewed her about her experiences as a chicken keeper on one occasion.

Francine Raymond (this is her real name) is a journalist and writer who specialises in writing about chicken keeping and gardening. She has been keeping chickens for around ten years. I visited Francine once when she told me about her experiences as chicken keeper and more generally about the chicken keeping trend and her motivations to found the hen keepers' association.

Fred is in his late 30s, works at a university and was involved in the Growhampton chicken keeping project. He provided valuable expertise, as he grew up in rural England with his father and himself keeping chickens for many years. Fred does not keep chickens at the moment.

Harold is in his 50s and lives with his wife and son in rural England. He keeps several chickens and two guinea fowl. I visited and interviewed Harold once when he told me about his experiences as a chicken keeper.

Harry is in his 40s and has been an important part of a group of people who are seeking to create a city farm in Greater London. I attended their bi-weekly meetings several times,

which gave me an opportunity to talk with them about their experiences as chicken keepers. Harry kept chickens in the past. He does not keep chickens at home at the moment, but he is involved in a community farm project where they keep chickens.

Hillary is in her early 60s and lives with her husband in Greater London. I visited and interviewed her once. She has two cats and keeps several chickens, some of them ex-commercial hens that she wants to give a second chance to.

Holly is in her late 40s and keeps around 20 chickens (hens and a few cockerels) on an allotment in Greater London. I visited her once and interviewed her during and after she showed me her chicken enclosure, her chickens and the rest of the allotment. She lives with her husband and two children.

Jen, a 19-year-old university student has been keeping chickens since she was 15. She keeps a flock of six hens and gets attached to her individual chickens. I met her in a café and interviewed her on one occasion.

Jill is in her 40s and is a friend and chicken keeper whose home I visited on several occasions. Jill lives in rural England in a residential area in a village. I have been talking with Jill about chickens throughout my research for several years and I formally interviewed her and her partner about their experiences as chicken keepers on one occasion. She keeps two hens.

Jodie and her 12-year old son **Tim** are neighbours of Shannon and Jamie. I visited and interviewed them one afternoon during my stay at the smallholding. Tim has been helping

Shannon and Jamie with mucking out the chicken areas, but they also keep four hens in their own garden.

Joel Williams (this is her real name) is in his mid-30s was until recently the growing project officer of Growhampton. He was also involved in the chicken project of Growhampton and he helped on several occasions with chicken related work. I formally interviewed Joel once.

Julie is in her 60s and is a friend of Simon (described below) and lives with her partner in rural England on a smallholding. Besides chickens, they also have larger livestock such as cows. I spent an afternoon at their smallholding together with my Simon. Julie has around 40 chickens.

Katie has been keeping chickens for less than five years. She is in her early 30s and lives with her parents. Besides chickens she keeps and cares for several other pets in her garden and inside the house which have been frequently abandoned by others. I visited and interviewed Katie twice. When I visited her the second time she had a mixed flock of five hens.

Luis, a chicken keeper in his early 30s, keeps chickens in a suburban area in England. He is originally from South-America and was inspired to keep chickens because of his childhood experiences of his grandmother keeping chickens. I met Luis briefly through a common friend and we had a conversation about his experiences with chicken keeping.

Lucy is in her 30s and lives on a smallholding, a community farm with her husband and toddler. She is the livestock manager at a community farm that I stayed at for one weekend. I talked to Lucy about the chicken aspect of the community farm and she talked with me about her aspirations for the place of the chickens at the farm.

Mark and Alda live and work on their smallholding in rural England. They are both in their mid-50s and keep pigs, goats, chickens and ducks on their smallholding. They have a large vegetable garden, which they need to reach their goal to achieve a high level of self-sufficiency. Alda gives cooking and yoga classes and is working on a cookbook. Mark teaches chicken-keeping classes and is involved in the local poetry festival. They both work with the livestock, but Mark is mostly responsible for the care of the chickens and the ducks. Mark describes himself as chicken aficionado as chickens have been part of his life since his early childhood with his mother teaching him about chickens and he also kept chickens when he established his own home. I stayed with Matt and Alda for two weekends, one in February and one in June.

Naomi is in her early 50s and lives in suburban England. I met Naomi at the Salisbury Poultry club meeting I attended once. We talked before the official meeting about her experiences as a chicken keeper and told me about other participants of the meeting.

Patrick is in his 40s and is a chicken keeper and breeder who has been a few years with his family in England but is originally from Germany. I visited Patrick, his wife and his two young children in their village in rural England after a few months of email correspondence in which we talked about chicken keeping. Patrick keeps a mixed flock of 10 chickens.

Paul is in his late 80s and keeps eight hybrid laying breed chickens on his allotment in Greater London. I visited him once and we talked about his hens while he showed me their enclosure. Paul kept 10 chickens on his allotment.

Ruth is in her 50s and, like Darren is, an inhabitant of the community farm in rural England I stayed at for one week. While Ruth is not directly involved in the care for the chickens, she gave me insights in the chicken related stories and tensions that occurred at the farm over the last 20 years.

Sam is a chicken keeper in her 30s who was introduced to me by a friend. She keeps chickens in her garden and also has a dog and cat. We talked about her experiences over the phone.

Sarah, in her late 30s is another neighbour of Shannon and Jamie. Sarah lives with her husband and two young children in a house with a large garden in rural England. They started keeping chickens around two years ago and whenever they need help with their chickens they ask Shannon for help. They keep three hens.

Shannon and Jamie are a couple with two young children who live on a smallholding in rural England. They are extremely interested in self-sufficiency and sell some of their produce on a local market. Their chickens provide Shannon and Jamie with an important source of income. Shannon, who is an experienced chicken keeper and who grew up in this rural area, gives chicken keeping-courses and breeds chickens that she sells to small-scale chicken keepers. I spent two weeks with Shannon and Jamie on their smallholding, helping them with work in their garden and with their chickens, frequently providing me

with the opportunity to talk with them about chicken keeping. They keep around 50 chickens on their property and raise around 30 more chickens at Shannon's mother's place

Simon is an experienced chicken keeper and fancy fowl breeder. He keeps his chickens in a backyard in a residential urban area in England and wins regularly awards for his chickens at pedigree poultry shows. Simon taught me a lot about chicken keeping and has been an important informant throughout my research.

Sophie, who is in her 60s, has been keeping chickens on her allotment in London for several years, but when I visited her she could only show me her empty chicken house as a fox had taken her hens during the winter. I interviewed her at the allotment where she used to keep up to 10 chickens at one point.

Stephanie is in her early 30s and grew up in and lives in Wales. She discovered her love for chicken keeping when volunteering at city farms in London and later started giving hands-on chicken keeping courses in Wales. I talked to Stephanie and attended one of her chicken keeping courses in Wales early on in my research. She keeps at least four hens.

Sue is in her late 40s and lives with her husband two children in suburban England. She has been keeping chickens for one year. Her husband had the idea of having chickens, as he grew up keeping chickens, but Sue has been taking care of the chickens and grew to like it more than she expected. Her children help her with the care and are enthusiastic about chicken keeping too. I interviewed Sue over the phone.

Teresa Sheppard (this is her real name) is in her mid-30s was until recently the project manager of Growhampton. Teresa and I set up the chicken project together and dealt with the early challenges and positive experiences of chicken keeping. I formally interviewed Teresa once.

Zoe is a chicken keeper in her 30s and works at a university. She only recently started keeping chickens and soon after she started a fox killed two of her hens, leaving her with three hens. I briefly talked to Zoe about her experiences as a chicken keeper when I met her through a friend.

2.14 [Chapter Summary](#)

My multi-sited ethnographic approach included the use of participant observation, semi-structured interviews, active participation in keeping chickens through my involvement in Growhampton, virtual ethnographic methods, and the consideration of written documents such as books, newspaper articles and chicken keeping manuals authored by chicken keepers.

As I explained above, I adapted aspects of the Grounded Theory approach as described by Charmaz (2006) and Thornberg and Charmaz (2014) as an analytic approach towards the analysis and interpretation of the material I collected. I consider this approach towards analysis as an extension of the ethnographic approach. I described techniques, such as qualitative coding and the creation of concept maps that were helpful for the interpretation of the material I collected. I reflected on my role as a researcher in the field when engaging with chicken keepers, considering characteristics and prior experiences

which framed and influenced how I perceived aspects of my research and in turn how I was perceived by others. Finally, I provided a list of research subjects and briefly described each person including their age, profession, and the environment they live in.

In the next chapter I will start to present and discuss material from my ethnographic study of the small-scale chicken keeping culture. This first empirical chapter will explore the use of terms and categories of chickens that are used by small-scale chicken keepers and that give first insights in the nature of the relationships chicken keepers have with their chickens.

3 Classifying chickens

This chapter examines the use of classification in relation to chickens by exploring practices that seek to define them for different purposes. I will show how different chickens are produced in specific contexts through practices of classification. Initially I chose three different perspectives and with it three ways of classifying chickens: commercial farming, pedigree breeders and finally the small-scale chicken keepers who I studied and the perspective which I will discuss in more detail. The analysis in this chapter uses literature from Tuan (1984), Bowker & Star (2000), Yarwood & Evans (2000), and Wilkie (2010), and the empirical material derives primarily from the virtual ethnography (especially information available on Omlet, Flytesofancy and the observation of discussions on blogs and Facebook) and interviews with Shannon and Jamie, Francine, and Mark. Prior to discussing the empirical material I provide a brief introduction to the rationale of using concepts related to classification and categories and then move on to describe how chickens have been classified in the commercial farming sector and by pedigree chicken breeders – the first two perspectives.

3.1 Classification and categories

The description, exploring, and analysis of categories and the use of classification systems utilized by groups of people has been used in the field of anthropology as a powerful tool of analysis for decades. Classification systems do not have to take a formal format, but they are part of how we process experiences and structure our daily lives: “Categories are those entities which the human mind creates in order to make sense of the diversity of experiences, by grouping things, attributes and phenomena on the basis of similarity and difference” (Ellen 2006, 1). As Bowker and Star (2000) point out, we all spend time

constantly classifying things in our lives. This includes the way we think of animals: whether we classify animals as edible or inedible creatures or as livestock or pets,⁸ whether we consider animals to be cute and fluffy and worth protecting or as disgusting and worthless. We decide how animals are supposed to be kept and whether it is acceptable to keep certain animals in our homes or outdoors, in cities or only in rural environments. We think of animals as useful and productive, or as vermin that need to be exterminated. These decisions and classifications are not based on natural categories, but on social relations and processes. Categories have labels and are used by several people, such as by communities of practice (Wenger 1998), as in the case of small-scale chicken keepers, can act as artefacts and can help us to understand the activities and views of this group of people (Bowker & Star 2000). Before I explore the ways small-scale chicken keepers view their chickens, I need to introduce the way chickens as a source of food have been classified commercially and later how pedigree breeders classify chickens.

The vast majority of chickens that live (and die) in the UK spend their lives in commercial poultry farms. However, in the 'Poultry and Poultry Meat Statistics' (DEFRA 2016), a monthly publication by DEFRA, which includes numbers of birds slaughtered among other data, there is not a single use of the word chicken. The category poultry includes more than chickens: poultry statistics also contain data on the turkeys, ducks and geese (the latter is only mentioned in a footnote). Rather than referring to chickens and possible subcategories, the report uses categories of production: broilers, boiling fowl and spent layers. Categories of production have not only been used in the commercial poultry sector, but also in economic studies on livestock productivity: livestock was studied in

⁸ I will turn to a discussion of the animal categories livestock and pets, edible and inedible chickens in chapter 7: Edible pets – transgressing boundaries.

terms of 'units of production' (Yarwood & Evans 2000, 98) with corresponding categories of production (Coppock et al. 1964). Besides the classification of cattle in dairy cattle and beef cattle, Coppock et al. (1964) also mention the classification of fowl in table and laying fowl.

A second perspective and way of classifying chickens is that of pedigree chicken breeders (also referred to as fancy fowl breeders or fanciers). As previously mentioned, while pedigree chicken breeders often keep chickens on a small scale as well, they do not represent the focus of my thesis. This is because their practices are distinctly different compared with the kind of small-scale chicken keepers I was interested in. Their focus lies on the aesthetics of their chickens and on the practice of breeding with an awareness of the role of genetics and the science of breeding. The chickens are also kept in a different physical space, often having less space available and being separated from each other according to their breeds to prevent crossbreeding.⁹

Pedigree breeders, and generally people involved in the poultry show culture, classify chickens most importantly according to their breeds: chickens are first of all classified as either large fowl or bantam breeds, then, as a subcategory, according to their breed (e.g. Wyandotte, Leghorn and Sussex) and once more according to their colour (each breed comes in several colour and pattern variations). For example, the British Poultry club recognises following Wyandotte chicken breed variations: barred, black, blue, blue-laced, blue partridge, buff, buff-laced, Columbian, gold-laced, partridge, red, silver-laced, silver-pencilled and white, which vary in their colours and patterns, yet belong to the same

⁹ These comments about pedigree chicken breeders are based on conversations with pedigree chicken breeders and on observations I made when visiting pedigree chicken breeders.

chicken breed. Other categories in the pedigree chicken keeping culture are the classification of chickens according to their shape of comb (e.g. rose comb, pea comb, and buttercup comb), their kind of feathers (hard feather and soft feather breeds) and a classification of breeds in either light or heavy breeds (Bassom 2009). Some small-scale chicken keepers outside the pedigree breeding circles also use some of these expressions. Interestingly, these terms are defined in some instances in slightly different ways. I will discuss some of these instances below.

Small-scale chicken keepers form a type of community of practice, which is defined as “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger et al. 2002, 4). I observed that there are several ways for chicken keepers to acquire their skills, but usually some form of interaction with more experienced chicken keepers is part of the learning process. This could occur through direct contact with a more experienced chicken keeper, such as a friend or through the participation in a chicken keeping course, or through sources found online (such as YouTube, discussion forums or social networking sites). In both cases, personal enskilment (Palsson 1994) takes place when novice chicken keepers not only inform themselves about chicken keeping, but also actively engage in the activity, while depending on feedback of the experts to improve. Small-scale chicken keeping is usually not a group activity, nor does it create situations for regular physical meetings between the members of this culture. Yet a common language and categories of chickens do emerge through the diverse ways that people inform themselves in the ways briefly mentioned above.

While most small-scale chicken keepers have some knowledge of chicken breeds they gather through books and online, there are some additional and arguably more frequently-used terms and categories that mirror these *other* relationships and perspectives they have in the human-chicken relationships. While according to Ellen (2006, 6) it is easy to ignore “inconvenient features of people’s classifying behaviour which do not fit the expected pattern”, I could not identify one coherent, precise classification system, which was used by all small-scale chicken keepers. This is because I was not studying one coherent group of people who were in regular contact with each other. Yet I believe that there is great value in discussing a few chosen categories of chickens that are frequently used by the people I engaged with and observed, both online and offline. Firstly, I discuss breed-related categories used by chicken keepers, ‘rare’ breeds on the one hand and hybrid chickens on the other. I then describe the classification of chickens according to their temperament in docile and flighty chickens. Other categories I will discuss are ex-commercial hens and breeding stock and other chickens. As previously mentioned, I will provide a description and discussion of an unofficial classification system of chickens, rather than the discussion of breeds and productive categories as discussed above. Figure 5 outlines and ranks categories of chickens that are produced in the small-scale chicken keeping context and that I will describe in this chapter.

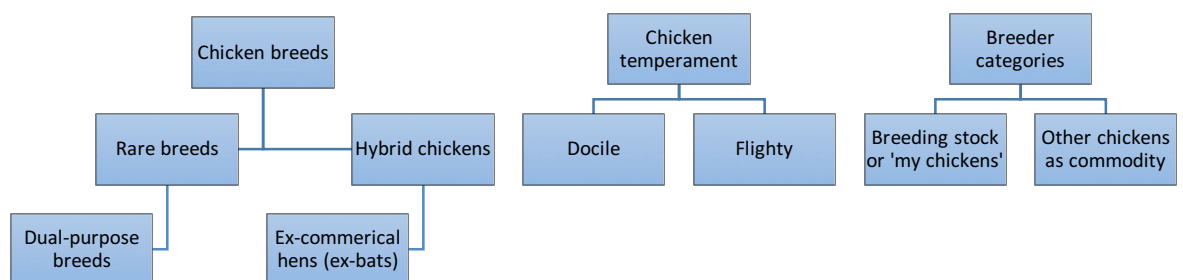


Figure 5 Classification of chickens by small-scale chicken keepers

The first category of chickens which I discuss is composed by 'rare' breeds, a term which I encountered in conversation with small-scale chicken keepers and pedigree chicken keepers. For these groups, the term 'rare breed' has a different meaning. Rare breeds are especially most recently an extremely sought-after category of chicken. I will start the section on rare breeds with some of the insights I gained through Growhampton, a food-sustainability project at the University of Roehampton.

3.2 Classifying chicken breeds

In this section I will describe a different understanding of chicken breeds. I will particularly contrast two breed related categories, rare breeds and hybrid chickens. I will begin with the detailed description of what chicken keepers consider to be a rare breed and what they value in a chicken and then move on to contrast this with hybrid chickens.

3.2.1 Rare breeds

I was involved in setting up a food education project in collaboration with a food sustainability project called Growhampton based at the University of Roehampton (more about the project in chapter 5). Shortly after the chickens arrived at the University, I had the opportunity to witness people's reactions and overhear some of the conversations about the chickens while they watched them (see Figure 6 for a picture of the Growhampton chickens). Staff, students, and members of the local community were often surprised when they first saw them: they usually commented on the appearance of the hens and noticed that they looked special and different to what they imagined a chicken to look like. I was told that "they are huge" and people were surprised by their diversity



Figure 6 Four of the hens of the initial Growhampton chicken flock

of appearances ("is this a normal chicken? It looks so fancy"). A university staff member criticized Growhampton for choosing "unproductive designer chickens instead of normal chickens".

The Growhampton staff, Simon, a friend and chicken breed expert and I chose chicken breeds at a poultry auction that we visited for this purpose. We chose two Silver-laced

Wyandotte, one Lavender Araucana, one Lavender-Cuckoo Araucana, two Speckled Sussex and two Copper Maran hens. Small-scale chicken keepers would refer to these breeds as traditional, rare or pure breeds. These three terms have in other contexts of course very different meanings, but small-scale chicken keepers tend to use these expressions interchangeably (as I have observed online, in conversation with Shannon and Jamie and as observed on websites of breeder who offer 'rare' breeds). Shannon and Jamie and other breeders use these terms when referring to non-commercial and non-cross chicken breeds. The British Poultry Club, the "guardians of the British Poultry Standards" define these terms on their website (The Poultry Club of Great Britain n.d.):

Pure breeds are the traditional breeds of poultry, developed in various countries for various purposes, mostly since Victorian times. They are also used for exhibition and have Standards for shape and colour. On the whole they only lay eggs during the longer days. They can produce meat and some of the rarer breeds are particularly beautiful.

Thus, according to the British Poultry Club, pure breed chickens are established chicken breeds with strict standards for appearance, and are usually neither very productive egg layers nor are they specialised meat birds. It is not clear how the British Poultry Club defines the term traditional breed. While a clear distinction between pure and traditional breeds is not made, according to the British Poultry Club, there is a difference between rare and pure chicken breeds: not all standardised chicken breeds can be automatically considered rare breeds. According to the British Poultry Club website, breeds are rare when they do not have their own specialist breed club or society to protect their stock bloodlines, which would mean that the Rare Poultry Society is responsible for them. All

breeds safeguarded by the Rare Poultry Society are considered rare breeds. This is, however, not how small-scale chicken keepers in practice use the expression rare breed. When chicken keepers mentioned in conversation a rare breed, they essentially never talked about a breed that is protected by the Rare Poultry Society and thus officially considered a *rare* breed - it does not reflect the actual danger of extinction. This can, for example, be also seen in how an established poultry breeder offer their chickens for the small-scale chicken keeping market advertise their chickens: “we have a selection of rare pure breed hens and cockerels for sale including Plymouth Barred Rock, Cream Legbar, Lavender Araucana” (Wilson Rare Breed Poultry 2016).

The term rare breed here signifies preciousness and higher value of non-commercial breeds. Non-commercial breeds are diverse in their appearances compared to commercial breeds, which are known to appear in mostly brown or white colour patterns. Small-scale chicken keepers who choose to keep rare breed chickens, as defined by them, usually have besides the interest in fresh eggs a number of motivations for choosing to keep these breeds. Keepers who choose to keep chickens only for the supply of fresh eggs keep more productive and more readily available cross or hybrid breeds - especially in commercial settings. Yarwood and Evans (2000) and Wilkie (2010) wrote about these *other* reasons for why people keep rare breeds and about the creation of a niche market for rare livestock breeds. As Holloway (2001) notes, “the value of any individual animal, or species of domestic animal, can [...] be geographically variable” (2001, 295). This is displayed in the example of rare breeds. While rare chicken breeds, hitherto non-commercial breeds, are not of interest for the intensive production of eggs or meat in commercial settings, Yarwood and Evans (2000) discuss three ways of how rare livestock breeds have been re-valued and utilised. I will follow Yarwood and Evans’s (2000)

approach towards the post-productivistic paradigm and parallel it with rare breeds of chickens.

I engage with the literature on post-productivity agriculture, which suggests that there has been a shift from productivistic agrarian priorities to post-productivistic agriculture. Productivistic agriculture is characterised by the processes of industrialisation, commercialisation, and intensification (Wilson 2001). The shift towards post-productivism is, among other aspects, characterised by “the loss of the central position of agriculture in society” (Wilson 2001, 82), by a new focus on quality rather than quantity of produce by on-farm diversification and by new environmental regulation and governmental support (Evans et al. 2002). While the conceptualisation of a post-productivistic agriculture has been critiqued as too simplistic and dualistic (Evans et al. 2002), I believe it still represents a valuable perspective towards understanding the change in agricultural production and the relationships we have to livestock. I chose to use Yarwood and Evans (2000) approach to discuss the place of rare chicken breeds in the small-scale chicken keeping culture.

Yarwood and Evans (2000) post-productivistic paradigm claims that after years of overproducing food and its associated environmental damage, there is a shift towards more environmentally-friendly farming and concerns over food quality – rare breeds are then re-valued:

- 1) Rare breed products (meat, milk, eggs, wool) could potentially represent a niche market: their products have been marketed as superior and of higher quality

compared with commercially produced foods. The argument is made that there is a quantity/quality payoff.

- 2) Rare breeds as part of on-farm diversification and attraction of farm tourism: rare breeds are unusual and have the potential to attract visitors.
- 3) Finally rare breeds as part of a sustainable form of agriculture: their unique genetic material needs to be protected and these breeds have potential values that cannot be found in commercial breeds. Yarwood and Evans (2000) exemplify as possibly valuable characteristics the diverse forms of grazing behaviour in rare livestock breeds that could become valuable and make a conservation of rare breeds essential.

In the following paragraphs I explore my material on rare breeds through the lens of these three types of utilisation of rare breeds (as superior quality, as attraction of farm tourism, and as potential valuable resource) as described by Yarwood and Evans (2000). I will give examples of how chicken keepers and consumers value rare breed products and attributes and explain how these breeds contribute to a kind of farm tourism and diversification.

Rare breeds as producers of quality and not quantity foods represent an existing niche as described by Yarwood and Evans (2000). I experienced the marketing of rare breed products when staying with smallholders Shannon and Jamie who bred rare breeds on a small scale, while also offering chicken keeping and hatch-to-dispatch courses and selling the eggs of their chickens, quails and ducks. They keep several well-known chicken breeds, among them Cream Legbars, Araucanas, and Welsummers. While these breeds are less

common than selectively bred and highly productive commercial breeds, they are not considered rare (in the sense that they are protected by the Rare Poultry Society) or endangered. Nevertheless, Shannon and Jamie refer to themselves as rare chicken breeders and market their eggs as rare breed eggs on the weekly town market. On the way to the market, Jamie picks up around 200 organic eggs from a free-range poultry farm, which he also sells at the market. Only with the additionally purchased organic farm eggs does the market day become profitable for Jamie. When arranging the eggs on the market stand, he labels the eggs from his hens “rare breed eggs” and the other eggs as “organic eggs”. Frequently customers came especially for the rare breed eggs and when they were sold out, some customers left empty-handed, showing no interest in organic eggs. Shannon and Jamie are not certified organic farmers and yet while there were organic eggs available, most people chose the rare breed eggs. According to some of these customers, these eggs had a superior taste and texture compared to supermarket eggs.

Jamie and Shannon's use of rare breeds represents a good example for how people possibly assign value and superiority to this category of chickens. Similarly the meat of chickens from small-scale chicken keepers seems to be especially desired. Holly, a 45-year-old woman who keeps her chickens on her allotment, told me about her experience of culling and eating her first home-raised cockerel. She described the taste as unlike any chickens she had eaten before. She explained that the texture and taste reminded her of game and the tenderness specifically of rabbit. Holly believed that part of the reason that the chicken's meat was tastier than "normal chicken" was due to the fact that she raised it in her garden, but also because they were "rare breeds" (quote Holly) and that this contributed to the difference in texture and taste.



Figure 7 Speckled Sussex chickens (Growhampton chickens)

Another reason for people to keep non-commercial chicken breeds is the variation in appearances between and within chicken breeds. There are over one hundred chicken breeds that have been standardized with the British Poultry Standard. Each breed comes

in different colour patterns (e.g. there are speckled and light variations of the Sussex breed – see Figure 7 Speckled Sussex Chickens). Some breeds are booted (which means that they have feathered feet) others are crested (they have a more dominantly feathered head), some have many soft and long feathers, which gives them a round and fluffy shape, whereas others have a sleeker and smoother shape. Hard feather breeds have tighter and rougher feathers and have been historically bred for cockfighting. Due to their historic use in cockfighting, these breeds are still classified as game birds and are mostly kept by pedigree breeders who show them at pedigree poultry shows. This variety of chickens, that look unlike anything people think of when they think of chickens has, according to Yarwood and Evans (2000), the potential to act as attraction as a form of tourism. During my time as a volunteer at a city farm, I observed the surprise and fascination of visitors who were intrigued by the colour patterns and differences between the different birds that were kept in enclosures on the farm. A few months into my time as a volunteer a city farm in London, the farmyard manager decided to focus only on raising rare breeds to develop a small breeding enterprise and to sell these birds to small-scale chicken keepers. The demand of rare breed chickens has steadily increased and additionally he saw the value of these colourful *different* breeds for attracting visitors to the farm.

Another increasingly important reason for people appreciating rare breeds is the otherness of these birds and of the eggs they lay. Rare chicken breeds often lay eggs of diverse shades of cream, a range from white to dark brown, from a pale rose to pale green and shades of blue (see Figure 8). There are only slight differences in egg colours within breeds. Often small-scale chicken keepers keep specific rare breeds of chickens because of their diverse eggshell colours and less because of their appearance, productivity or character. For example while Cream Legbar chickens are considered ‘flighty’ breeds and

therefore harder to catch and pick up, they are still popular because of their colourful eggs.



Figure 8 Eggs in different shades (Growhampton chicken eggs)

In summer 2015, I observed that Tesco and Waitrose started to stock rare breed chicken eggs that had unusual eggshell colours (chocolate brown and blue shades), which indicated that colourful eggs became increasingly popular among consumers. Besides the attraction of rare breeds based on aesthetic reasons, chicken keepers also value rare breeds, because they are *not* specialised and highly-productive chickens, as I will show in the next paragraphs.

The conservation aspect of protecting rare breeds and with it possibly valuable characteristics is the third notion of the post-productivistic paradigm discussed by Yarwood and Evans (2000). This hidden value of rare breeds was also noted by Alderson (1994), who argues that the selective commercial breeding and exclusive interest in

maximising productivity leads to the extinction of non-commercial breeds of domestic livestock. This loss of non-commercial breeds creates a potential irretrievable loss of valuable genetic material and characteristics.

An example of a value characteristic in a rare breed of chickens was given by Mark, a smallholder with whom I stayed with for several days. Mark, who is passionate about chicken keeping, told me about the diverse foraging behaviour he observes in his mixed (a variety of different breeds) flock. He believes that rare breeds of chickens show a different scratching and pecking behaviour compared with commercial chicken breeds and he believes that they are less destructive and they “go easier on the grass” and vegetation in a garden. He explained that commercial chickens are bred to be “eating and laying machines” and are more active scratchers and foragers.

Another characteristic, highly valued in rare breeds, is their dual-purpose quality. Chicken breeds which can be raised for both eggs and meat are referred to as dual-purpose chickens (Beebe 2016). These birds are usually bigger, heavier and put on weight more easily than other breeds, which “makes the culling worth the effort” as Shannon, a smallholder who grew up in rural England with parents keeping chickens, told me. By ‘effort’, Shannon explained, she meant the feeding costs of rearing the birds and the time investment of butchering and cooking it. At the same time these birds are also productive egg layers. These two qualities in chickens are in commercial breeds exclusive to another – commercial meat birds (also known as broilers and table birds) tend to lay only small numbers of eggs every year and commercial egg laying breeds tend to be lighter and smaller. While I did not encounter people raising broilers, I did however interview several

people who kept dual-purpose chickens and who slaughter them, such as Shannon and Holly.

Holly is an urban chicken keeper who grew up in London and started keeping chickens on her large urban allotment. Holly and her husband own a home with garden not far from the allotment, but she is not permitted according to her house deeds to keep chickens in her garden, nor does she feel that there is sufficient sunlight to keep them or even grow vegetables. Holly enjoys eating the eggs her hens lay, but she also enjoyed letting her hens hatch chicks, which leads inevitably to her raising male chicks. The breeds that she chooses to hatch chicks from are dual-purpose breeds. After raising the cockerels for five months, she butchers and prepares the birds for dinner.

While rare chicken breeds are often not rare in an endangered sense, they might be rare in a sense that most living chickens globally are commercial breeds that have a very similar appearance and are kept to produce. Rare breeds seem to be appreciated on several levels *because* of their otherness, and by paralleling Yarwood and Evans (2000) notion of post-productivism, I showed how the appreciation for the otherness of these breeds has been marketed.

In the following section I will highlight how the perceptions of rare breeds manifest themselves on the website of Omlet, a company specialized in poultry keeping products and services. I will discuss Omlet in more detail in chapter 4, but at this point I will describe one function on Omlet's website that allows chicken keepers to explore and find information on popular chicken breeds. This tool gives additional insights about how chickens are classified and thought of in the small-scale chicken keeping culture.

3.2.2 Reviewing chickens

Omlet's website features a breed guide (similar to most chicken-keeping books), which has a dedicated page for each popular chicken breed. On each breed's page, a few paragraphs on the history, characteristic behaviour and colour variations of the breed are provided. This information provided by Omlet gives a good indication on where they believe the priorities for small-scale chicken keepers lie when choosing chicken breeds. On the page of the Barnevelder breed (see Figure 9), for example, one can find following description for the characteristic behaviour of the breed authored by Omlet (n.d.-b):

They are lazy chickens! So for that reason they do need to be kept free range so that they are well exercised. The chicks produced are yellow in colour and are quite slow at growing their darker feathers which come later. The hens do go broody often but this makes them a docile chicken and a good mother.

Omlet notes in the quote above that these birds do not require much space nor do they need to be kept free range. Space is often an issue for chicken keepers in suburban and urban environments. Other times it is less the lack of space than the need to protect the garden from the chickens. The last sentence is especially interesting as it illustrates the dilemma that many chicken keepers face between the attractions of docile breeds, which are easily tameable (more about this below) and the sometimes negatively perceived behaviour of hens going broody. Broody hens stop laying eggs and only rarely leave their nest as they sit on their eggs for weeks at a time and it is a behaviour that is often listed in the poultry illnesses/disease section of chicken keeping guides, with advice on how to fix this problem. E.g. in case of Omlet, I discovered advice on broody hens in the section Chicken health/common chicken problems (Omlet n.d.-e).

Homepage / Chicken, Duck and Quail Information / Chickens / Barnevelder

Barnevelder



History

The Barnevelder was developed by the Dutch in the town of Barneveld. The intention was to develop a hen that was both hardy and would produce eggs that were brown in colour. Also one that would be able to be sold in the UK. The breeds that made up the Barnevelder were very carefully chosen. A Dutch fowl crossed with a Langshan, Brahma and Cochin. Most of the Barnevelders have long disappeared. The ones still around do lay quite well as long as they are not allowed to get fat!

Breed Rating (26 Reviews)

Appearance	★★★★★
Friendliness	★★★★★
Hardiness	★★★★★
Egg	★★★★★
Garden	★★★★☆

[Write Review](#)

Figure 9 Screenshot from the Barnevelder breed page (Source: Omlet n.d.-b)

Interestingly Omlet also provides a method for chicken keepers to directly review chicken breeds. Part of the review is an option to rate breeds on a scale from 0 to 5 stars according to five categories (see Figure 10 Omlet's breed rating tool): People can rate the breed here according to their appearance, friendliness, hardiness, egg and garden. The first three attributes are quite self-explanatory and have been mentioned before: chicken keepers are encouraged to rate how attractive the appearance of the birds is, whether they are friendly (or docile) and whether they are able to sustain cold and wet weather. 'Egg' stands for the egg laying productivity of the breed but could also partly refer to the attractiveness of the eggshell colours. The last attribute, 'garden' stands for the compatibility of the breed with a garden. Some breeds are said to be more active diggers and peckers than others and are therefore more likely to disturb the gardens of chicken keepers.



Figure 10 Omlet's breed rating tool (Source: Omlet n.d.-b)

These categories, created by Omlet, reflect the most valued attributes that chicken keepers seek in a chicken: pretty, tame, healthy, productive and 'does not ruin your garden'. The perfect "pet with benefits" as Sarah, a chicken keeper with young children who only recently started to keep chickens, put it. Chicken breeders try to create and offer a perfect chicken *product* that ticks all these boxes. Before I discuss the category of

chickens as product, I will introduce another important category of chickens, the commercial chicken breeds, and contrast them to the rare breeds.

3.2.3 Hybrid (or commercial) chickens

Commercial chicken breeds are selectively highly-crossbred chickens that have been bred to achieve high levels of productivity to be either excellent egg layers or broilers. They are, in contrast to the kind of chickens previously mentioned not officially acknowledged as breeds by the British Poultry Club. Commercial chicken breeds are often referred to as hybrid chickens.

Crossbreed chickens, breeds which have been crossed by small-scale chicken breeders, are also often referred to as hybrids, but in contrast to commercial chickens are often only simple crosses between pure breed hens (Wilson Rare Breed Poultry 2016). Breeders or small-scale chicken keepers often 'create' such crossbreeds. While some consider only selectively bred and highly productive commercial chickens to be hybrids, small-scale chicken keepers and breeders producing for the small-scale chicken keeping market do not always make a distinction between those two different kinds of crosses: everything not considered a rare breed is referred to as hybrid (Omlet n.d.-g; Wilson Rare Breed Poultry 2016). Therefore, following this notion, when hybrid chickens are mentioned in this thesis, these are defined as chickens which are not considered a pure, rare or traditional breed.

As mentioned above, small-scale chicken keepers do not only value their chickens' productivity but also their diversity in appearances and eggshell colours and certain

temperament traits. Small-scale breeders therefore started to breed for these characteristics when they breed hybrids. There are some established and popular hybrids that get frequently recreated and bred. These crosses do not breed true meaning that when crosses reproduce, their offspring will not have necessarily have a similar appearance and level of productivity as their parents. Therefore breeders who want to continue breeding the same kind of hybrid have to begin with the parent stock to get the same results. The parent stock stays with the breeder for longer periods of times, in contrast to the hybrids which are usually sold to other keepers. Small-scale breeders, who usually produce for the small-scale chicken keeping market, tend to assign these hybrids with similar breed names, sometimes with small adjustments. Usually small-scale breeders offer between three to six hybrids. In the following paragraphs I will give two examples of such hybrids:

- 1) Bluebell chickens (name variations that I have encountered include Blue, Blue Haze or Blue Ranger) are crosses between Rhode Island Red cockerels and Maran hens and are said to be especially docile. Docility is a character trait which is desirable in chickens for the small-scale chicken keeping market. Docile hens are popular among chicken keepers as they are easier to touch and catch (more about this below).
- 2) The Skyline (also Jasmine) is a Legbar cross in combination with other breeds. They are extremely popular because the majority of Skyline hens lay light-blue eggs as the Legbar parent breed does.

Hybrids such as the Bluebell and the Skyline, are created by breeders, can vary in appearance, are often considered less precious compared with rare breed hens. This is also reflected in the market price: hybrid chickens are substantially cheaper than rare breeds (adult hybrids are usually available for around £15 and rare breed chickens between £25-45). Hybrids are cheaper to produce, as these breeds are often sex-linked, which means that cockerels can be identified and culled earlier (when they are days old) compared with cockerels of other breeds. They are also more available on the market and are advertised as the perfect pet chicken that combines an attractive appearance with docile character and high productivity (Bell Plantation Garden Centre 2017):

Rhode Island Red/Barred Plymouth rock hybrid has beautiful black plumage and a petrol coloured sheen, shot through with gold on its head and sometimes in the tail. Not only is it beautiful, and a prolific egg layer this hen has very docile temperament, making it the perfect garden pet.

Small-scale chicken keepers who are not selectively breeding chickens often only have limited interest in whether their chickens are rare or hybrid breeds. Ellie, a mother of two young children, who recently started keeping chickens when on maternity leave, did not know what breeds her hens were when I asked her about them, nor was she interested in finding out about chicken breeds. She named them, liked to watch them and keep them healthy, but information on their breeds were not of interest to her. Katie who had a mix of ex-commercial hens, hybrids and pure breeds, also showed little interest in knowing about the breed heritage of her chickens. Gaining this kind of knowledge is not their priority. They are interested in their chickens' individual characters, appearances, eggshell

colours, potential health issues and the steady supply of eggs rather than then learning about chicken breeds.

However, another group exists composed of more breed aware chicken keepers, who seem to prefer rare breed hens: small-scale chicken keepers who “caught the chicken bug” and like to add new chicken breeds to their flock – an expression frequently used among chicken keepers in chicken-keeping groups on Facebook. This is a recurring theme that I observed especially in Facebook groups focused on small-scale chicken keeping in the UK (e.g. *The Obsessive Chicken Disorder – OCD* which was founded by a British keeper or *Chicken Keeping UK*). In these groups people share information about and learn about chicken breeds and their qualities and discuss the latest additions or losses in their flock. While some chicken keepers add new breeds to their flock because of their aesthetics, or colourful eggs, others said that they liked the diversity in the breed specific characters. They refer to it as “trying out a breed” when they acquire a breed that they have not kept before. When I asked Andy, a chicken keeper and blogger, to further explain what he means by ‘trying out a breed’ he said that he liked to “discover the special characteristics of each breed. Every breed has its own peculiarities, they really have, and it is every time again interesting to discover them”.

So, besides an interest in the pure aesthetics and productive properties of the chickens, chicken keepers seem to be interested in the behaviour of their chickens and discovering their individual characters. Therefore, the next binary classification of chickens consists of two terms (docile and flightily) that are frequently used for describing the temperament of chickens.

3.3 Docile and flighty chickens

There are two major character traits in chickens that are used consistently by small-scale chicken keepers to describe individual chickens: docile or flighty. Overall among small-scale chicken keepers docile hens seem to be more popular. Good pet hens are hens that are docile and thus allow you to hold and pet them. Francine Raymond, the founder of the Hen Keepers' Association mentions docile hens in one of her articles (Raymond 2011a):

I usually recommend beginner's breeds like the decorative Pekin, that comes in so many colours that each member of even the largest family could have its own different coloured bird to care for. Docile and patient, they're like little tea cosies with feathery legs.

Docile hens are desired pets as they tend to be easily tameable. I identified multiple blog entries and book sections dedicated to taming chickens (Jarman 2015).

Ex-commercial hens are hens kept in commercial egg laying farms before being adopted by small-scale chicken keepers and are especially desired because of their docile nature. They are extremely popular among chicken keepers despite their reputation of frequent health issues (more about it in the next section on ex-commercial hens).

The term docile is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as "ready to accept control or instruction; submissive" (Stevenson 2010a, 515). We find this notion of pets in Tuan's (1984, 2) work: "Dominance may be cruel and exploitative, with no hint of affection in it.

What it produces is the victim. On the other hand, dominance may be combined with affection, and what it produces is the pet". Thus, the power relations in the human-pet relationship are, for Tuan, necessarily unequal – with the human dominance over the animal, they become a pet. There are multiple examples for how we exert our power over pets: they depend on us for food, water, exercise (in case of chickens, this would mean letting them roam free for some hours in the garden, but restricting their movement at night) and we prevent them to reproduce freely. Tuan specifically also considers the act of touching the animal, petting it, as an act of dominance (1984).

Chicken keepers who prefer the flighty category of chickens have a different approach towards chicken keeping compared with people who prefer docile hens. Mark, a chicken keeper who lives on a smallholding in suburban England, prefers flighty hens. Mark is in his mid-50s and has been keeping chickens since his childhood. He describes himself as 'chicken aficionado'. I met Mark when I stayed with him for a few days on his smallholding and I attended one of his chicken keeping courses. In the following quote he explains why he prefers flighty hens:

I prefer flighty hens because they have *character*, they are always up to something...are much more interesting and entertaining to watch. Hybrids are so submissive...makes it easier to handle them. This is not how I like them...it's not how hens are supposed to be. I want my hens for what they are and I don't want to turn them into something else.

I observed a similar appreciation of chickens when talking to another person, who has been providing me with valuable practical advice when setting up the Growhampton chickens project (more about Growhampton in chapter 5). In the beginning of the



Figure 11 Mark's chickens roaming on his smallholding

Growhampton project, still very new to chicken keeping, I was worried about two hens, which seemed to have enlarged crops which could be a sign for food blocking the path to the stomach. When I expressed my worries to Fred, a staff member at the University of Roehampton, who has been a chicken keeper himself and grew up in a rural area in England, he told me that “we will probably lose a few, but that’s how it is – no reason to worry”. Generally, Fred discouraged us from treating the enlarged crop.¹⁰ Furthermore Fred advised us “to let the hens be hens and don’t pick them up or pet them”. Both Mark, the smallholder I stayed with, and Fred believed that chickens are not there to be pet, picked up or tamed, but appreciated for what they are (see Figure 11, Mark’s chickens).

¹⁰ In contrast to Simon my friend and chicken keeping expert who advised us to massage the crop every day and to treat it with olive oil and whose advice we followed.

They enjoyed observing and generally keeping chickens, but they had a different relationship to chickens than they would have to pet animals.

Irvine (2004) discussed different perspectives for understanding the human-pet relationship, with power and dominance being just one of them. Crucially for her argument, she believes that we need to make a clear distinction between pets and companion animals. She argues that while the human-pet relationship is shaped by the dominance of the human over the pet, the human-companion animal relationship is based on appreciating “the animals for what they *are*, not for what they *could be* if only they were not so much like ‘animals’” (Irvine 2004, 28). By acknowledging and respecting the animal’s perspective, the animal becomes a companion animal rather than a pet that is kept to “please and entertain a human ‘master’” (2008, 28). Mark and Fred approach chicken keeping with an appreciation for the animals without a high level of domination (yet they both protect them from predators at night). While appreciating them for what they are, they also seem to be less attached to the individual chickens. Fred repeatedly mentioned that we “might lose a few” and that this is part of the *process* of keeping chickens. While I stayed with Mark on his farm, a fox took two of his hens. This event seemed to slightly affect his mood, but shortly after we left to pick up two young hens from a local chicken breeder. He did not mention the two hens he lost to the foxes again and merely mentioned that they were quite old and slow and that this was the reason the fox got them.

While Mark and Fred seem to appreciate the hens for being chickens, I am not sure that the relationship they have to their chickens can be categorized as human-companion animal relationship. Their level of attachment to the individual chickens seemed to be

rather low. Mark and Fred belong to the kind of chicken keeper who is interested in the *flock* rather than the *individual*. Part of this focus on the flock, rather than the individual is also an understanding of chicken keeping as a process: both men accept that part of chicken keeping is to lose a few and gain a few.

The next category of chickens, the ex-commercial hens, attracts chicken keepers who build up an attachment to the individual chicken and who define their relationship to the chickens as human-pet relationship.

3.4 Ex-commercial hens

Commercial laying hens are highly productive hybrid breeds that are kept for 72 weeks before they are discarded and replaced. After 72 weeks commercial laying hens become on average less productive, thus it is more cost effective to send them to slaughter and replace them with new laying hens. In 2005 the British Hen Welfare Trust (BHWT), a charity originally dedicated to educating the public about laying hen welfare, established its rehoming initiative. The BHWT started collaborating with farmers who agreed to give their unwanted laying hens to the charity instead of sending them to slaughter. These hens are referred to as ex-commercial hens, ex-battery hens (also jokingly ex-bats), or rescue-hens. After the hens are rescued from the farms, they are kept temporarily at distribution points, homes of people who volunteer to keep them for short periods of time. Chicken keepers who reserve ex-bats then pick their hens up from these distribution points and take them home to keep them. Over the last decade, BHWT rehomed over 450,000 laying hens from commercial settings (BHWT 2016). These hens were usually kept in (enriched) caged environments and, less frequently, in barns or free-range

environments. As stated on BHWT's website, hens that have been kept in caged environments are the small-scale chicken keepers preferred kind of ex-bats. Small-scale chicken keepers seem to find the experience of offering a better life to animals, which have been kept in cages preferable to *only* saving hens from barn or free-range environments (BHWT 2014):

many of you elect to wait for the true ex-bats, so you can enjoy watching them flourish [...] There's a strong feel-good factor that comes with adopting hens that have lived their lives in a caged environment knowing their working days are over.

Ex-bats are commonly thought to arrive as feather pecked, pale and unhealthy birds that need extra care. They are often kept separately from an existing flock until they recover from any serious health problems they might have. They tend to be weaker birds and take lower places in the pecking order. Chicken keepers enjoy watching these hens improve: the first time experiencing green grass, their wattles and comb turning into a deeper red and their feathers regrowing. Saving these hens from slaughter gives them, as indicated in the quote above, great satisfaction.

Another reason for their popularity is the temperament of these hens. Ex-commercial hens are thought to be extremely easy to tame and pick up. This is due to the fact that commercial hybrid breeds have been bred to be passive to reduce potential aggression and feather or comb pecking between hens sharing a space. A small-scale chicken keeper, Katie told me that they tend to occupy lower pecking order ranks in a mixed flock and seem to be slightly excluded from the flock. Katie thought that they were less interested in other hens, but more in their human owners. She really liked these character traits in

her hens and she frequently picked them up, petted them and talked to them. Small-scale chicken keepers such as Mark find this behaviour boring and almost suspicious. He found the passivity of hybrid breeds disturbing and had “to be careful to not to step on them, because they tend to be so close and they almost hop on your lap when you sit close to them”. According to Mark, proper chickens are hens that are curious, flighty and awake. He also does not understand why people choose to keep ex-bats, as they are “unhealthy birds and with many problems - especially for beginning chicken keepers. They have an expiration date of 1 ½ years and are not made to last much longer”.

While generally the BHWT and other charities engaged in the rescue of commercial hens broadly receive very positive media coverage, critical opinions regarding the activities of ex-commercial hen charities exist. Shannon, a chicken breeder I stayed with, argued that by giving commercial poultry farms an ethical option for discarding hens that are older than 72 weeks, these charities indirectly support the currently unsustainable system. According to Shannon, egg companies will be forced to find a more sustainable solution and thus improve the conditions for commercial laying hens only through sustained pressure from the public.

3.5 Breeding stock and other chickens

Wilkie (2010) described, as part of her study of commercial farm workers and hobbyist livestock keepers, another classification of animals into 'breeding animals' and 'store and prime animals'. Farmers and farm workers (among them hobby farmers) spend a significant time with their breeding animals, sometimes for a number of years and have the opportunity to get to know the individual livestock animal. On the other hand, store and prime animals are raised and kept sometimes only for several months, leaving not much time and opportunity to get to know the individual animal. I observed a similar



Figure 12 Breeding stock - Shannon's chickens

distinction made in relation to chickens when I stayed with Shannon and Jamie on their smallholding. Shannon and Jamie, who breed chickens on a small-scale and sell them to chicken keepers, classify their chickens in two different categories: "my/our chickens", (the breeding/parent stock) and "the birds" or "the other chickens" the products to be sold or eaten, which are the offspring of the breeding stock. Chickens that belong to the category breeding stock are carefully selected hens and cockerels that have been chosen

for specific qualities (e.g. appearance, egg quality, resistance to illnesses) and are in Shannon's case the product of years of selectively breeding for certain characteristics (not according to the poultry club breeding standards). They keep their breeding stock ("their chickens") only meters away from the entrance to their home. They keep four different breeds in separate enclosures and usually let them roam free for a few hours every day (see Figure 12). Through their living room window they observe the chickens roaming freely in their garden. They seem to be attached to "their chickens" and have named a few of them, even though they explained to me that they usually do not tend to name their chickens anymore (the last chickens they consciously named were the first six chickens they started to breed with). When I located a dead chick with the breeding stock, and I told Jamie, he seemed concerned about it and told me to show the chick to Shannon because she would be able to identify the cause of death. Shannon examined the chick, expressed some "awws" of regret and sadness and then decided that it was a chick neglected by her adoptive mother hen. She arrived at this conclusion because she said she noticed that her actual mother (the hen sitting on the eggs and which hatched the chicks) gave her up and another hen adopted the chick. She detected this because she pays attention to the hens and because they are closer to her house, making casual observation easier and the chickens more accessible.

Shannon uses an incubator to hatch chicks that she wants to breed and sell. She keeps the freshly hatched chicks for several weeks in a broody box, a box with a source of warmth such as a lamp, in the garden shed before moving them into enclosures within chicken houses behind her house. When I helped them with the care of the chickens, I discovered that their enclosures seemed to be extremely crowded compared to the space the breeding stock was kept in (see Figure 13).



Figure 13 'Other' chickens

When cleaning the enclosures of the chicks (they were kept separated by age groups), on several instances I located dead chicks covered by a layer of bedding. When mentioning this to Shannon she said “this happens sometimes. If there aren’t too many just double bag them and put them in the bin”. The chicks stay in the enclosures until they reached point-of-lay (POL) age and are then sold to small-scale chicken keepers. Neither Jamie nor Shannon feel attached to individual chickens which belong to the product category, the offspring of their chickens. As soon as Shannon identified the cockerels among the chicks, she moves them to a separate area to raise them as table birds or just culls them as soon they can be identified as cockerels, when they do not belong to the dual-purpose breeds.

Shannon and Jamie keep their breeding stock in better conditions, they sometimes name them and take more notice of them. The different levels of concerns when being confronted with dead chicks, show that they seem to have a different relationship to the

breeding stock compared with their offspring hatched in the incubator. Shannon and Jamie do not refer to their breeding stock as pets, but they perceive themselves as smallholders with livestock (chickens and in the past rabbits, which they reared for meat, are they only livestock they keep). While all their chickens are considered productive animals, they have different relationships to the breeding stock and with other chickens, which they consider products as they are going to be sold.

Wilkie's (2010) typology of relationships with livestock refers to four types of emotional relationships farmers or farm workers can have with their livestock, all of which I have briefly described in the Introduction. The four types are livestock as stock pet, as productive animal, as consumptive animal and as commodity animal in order of strong emotional attachment to emotional detachment. Shannon and Jamie's relationship to their breeding stock corresponds best to the category of productive animal, rather than stock pet, as they are not emotionally attached to the individual chicken, but they care about the wellbeing of "their chickens" and refer to individual animals (such as above "the chick with the adoptive mother" – they refer to individuals and not just a group of chickens). The chickens, which Shannon and Jamie raise to be sold, the offspring category of chickens best corresponds to the consumptive animal type of relationship. Individuals are not identified, but they are perceived as group. Some of them, especially the cockerels, are fattened for consumption while the hens are raised to be sold. Shannon and Jamie raise these hens for at least 10-16 weeks before they are sold.

3.6 Shifting categories

I have explored several different ways chickens are classified depending on the needs and interests of the group who uses the classification. Rather than focusing only on their productive properties as producers of food as the commercial farming sector does, their conformity to breed standards and aesthetics as valued by pedigree breeders, or even thinking of them as merely common chickens without diversity as people outside the chicken keeping culture do, small-scale chicken keepers have a different and hitherto an unexplored perspective towards these animals.

Small-scale chicken keepers use categories that correspond to several perspectives that have been introduced above: chickens are perceived as producers of food and therefore highly productive hybrids are popular and chicken keepers value the dual-purpose quality in chickens. They appreciate appearance and character traits in their chickens yet often do not focus on whether their birds meet the breed standards protected by the British Poultry Club (e.g. Shannon and other small-scale breeder I encountered do not put emphasis on how the birds should look like according to the standards, but rather on their egg productivity and whether they are prone to illnesses.) The needs of chicken keepers are reflected in the kind of chickens, which breeders for the small-scale chicken keeping market focus on namely productivity, character, appearance, and eggshell colours. Their preferences also resonate in Omlet's breed review categories previously described i.e. appearance, friendliness, hardiness, egg and garden.

In the initial paragraphs of this chapter I described how some of the categories have been used by pedigree chicken keepers or by the commercial farming sector, are also used by

small-scale chicken keepers to classify chickens. The meaning of labels and categories are flexible and depend on the particular context, on the beliefs and the needs of people using these terms (Bowker & Star 2000). On closer inspection some of the terms used by different kinds of chicken keepers have slightly different meanings and definitions adapted to the context and culture. Small-scale chicken keepers use the category 'rare' to classify all chickens that are not considered crosses or commercial chicken breeds. Rare breeds are 'special' chickens. The counterpart hybrid is often used for any chicken that is not rare (or purebred), which does not correspond to the classification systems used by the commercial poultry industry and the Poultry Club of Britain.

Other examples are the differences in how some small-scale chicken keepers define the term pullet compared with its use by fancy breeders: while for several small-scale chicken keepers I came in contact with (Holly and others online) a pullet is a female chicken that has not yet laid her first egg or a hen that is under one year of age, for pedigree breeders a pullet is defined as a female that has not yet gone through her first moult. One could argue (and Simon, my pedigree chicken-breeder friend and expert, does) that small-scale chicken keepers are merely misinformed. Yet, I considered this different use of the term pullet interesting as it reflects one aspect of the relationship that chicken keepers have to their chickens and with this a change of the classification of chickens. Primarily for small-scale chicken keepers, the important and exciting part of raising hens is the laying of their first eggs. As a chicken keeper in an online forum stated, a pullet is "a teenage hen, not quite adult but not quite chick either". So as soon as the chicken lays an egg, it is not anymore perceived as a teenager, a pullet, but has reached maturity and becomes a hen. I frequently discovered novice chicken keeper online posts of sharing a picture of the first

eggs their hens laid because they want to share the excitement about this event with the online community.

On the other hand, the way pedigree chicken breeders and many other knowledgeable UK chicken keepers use the word pullet also reflects what they consider to be the focus of their activity – the first moult and with it a complete transformation of their appearance turns the pullet into a hen. The focus lies on the aesthetics and the appearance of the hen rather than on their egg productivity. These descriptions of different definitions of the category pullet illustrate the flexibility of categories used by groups of people focusing on the same animal, but for different purposes and with different levels of experience. As Holloway suggested, “the value of any individual animal, or species of domestic animal, can, therefore, be [...] variable” (2001, 295). The context-dependent use of categories and labels underlines that classification systems and categories are socially adapted according to the needs of the group who study them.

Categories are those entities which the human mind creates in order to make sense of the diversity of experience, by grouping things, attributes and phenomena on the basis of similarity and difference (Ellen 2006, 1).

Small-scale chicken keepers I encountered did not use the fine distinctions and categories that are needed and used by pedigree chicken keepers to pursue their hobby. Pedigree chicken keepers have to know the difference between a rose comb and a buttercup comb and between a lace and pencil feather pattern. Small-scale chicken keepers and small-scale breeders are rather interested in whether their chickens are ‘rare’ and special or if they are hybrids, which are considered especially productive. They classify according to

the character of the individual hens (docile and flighty) and some other categories such as broody hens, ex-commercial hens, sex-linked breeds (which can be sexed when they are only days old) and dual-purpose chickens. These terms and categories are used by small-scale chicken keepers as they need them to “make sense of the diversity of experiences” (Ellen 2006, 1).

3.7 Concluding thoughts and chapter summary

This chapter examined the nature and use of classification in relation to chickens by exploring different practices of chicken keeping and their use of categories of chickens. I identified several ‘different kinds’ of chickens that were produced in the specific contexts through practices of classification. I established that chickens are classified by pedigree chicken breeders primarily according to breed characteristics and aesthetic values, such as their weight class, size, colour, type of comb among many other characteristics with an exclusive focus on pure bred chickens. The farming sector on the other hand, considers chickens in “units of production”, referring to categories related to their type of production or lack of production: broilers, boiling fowl, layers and ‘spent’ layers.

Practices of classification are individual or collective cultural processes that enable people to order and make sense of a diversity of experiences. The categories of chickens that small-scale chicken keepers use are the results of such practices of classification. I therefore selected, described and discussed the following categories used by small-scale chicken keepers: rare breeds and hybrids, docile and flighty hens, ex-commercial hens, and breeding stock and other chickens.

While I observed that small-scale chicken keepers are aware of chicken breeds and some of them use this form of classifying chickens, the categories 'rare breeds' and hybrids are used freely and are ranked on a higher relative level in the classification of chickens. 'Rare' breeds encompass several kinds of breeds, many of them are not necessarily in fact 'rare', in the sense that they are endangered breeds. The 'special' and 'precious' attributes of rare breed chickens have been utilised by different groups of people, and these chickens are, for example, marketed as producers of quality rather than quantity products, such as illustrated in the example of Shannon and Jamie with their high in demand rare breed eggs. Hybrids, a category which is used by small-scale chicken keepers for all chickens which cannot be assigned to a specific chicken breed, stands in contrast to rare chickens. This category also includes commercial chicken breeds, as used in commercial farms.

The next kind of classification of chickens is according to their individual characters or to their breed characteristic temperament. Flighty chickens are quick, nervous, usually of lighter and smaller breeds, and are difficult to catch and pick up. Docile chickens are easy to catch, slower, often allow the keepers to touch them, and easier to tame. While some chicken keepers prefer flighty chickens because they believe that is how chickens should behave naturally, others prefer docile chickens, as they can be easily caught and stroked and make better pets. Ex-commercial hens, another category of chickens that I chose to examine and discuss, are appreciated for their docility. Ex-commercial hens or ex-bats are hens that have been discarded by commercial farms due to a drop in productivity and have been taken in by small-scale keepers. Small-scale keepers enjoy observing these hens recover and improve, both in their behaviour and their physical appearance.

The classification of chickens in 'breeding stock' and 'other chickens' is mostly utilized by small-scale breeders. Breeding stock are kept for longer periods of time giving the keepers more opportunities to engage with them and to perceive them as individuals (which they sometimes name). The offspring of the breeding stock are considered commodities or meat birds and the breeder does not grow attached to the individual chickens.

The discussion and description of some of the categories, used by small-scale chicken keepers, provided me with insights about their specific interests and needs in relation to the practice of chicken keeping. In contrast to pedigree chicken keepers or the commercial sector, chickens are appreciated by small-scale keepers in diverse ways, with at times simultaneous focus on their productive qualities, their aesthetics, and their individual characters.

In the next chapter I will explore the infrastructures and material culture of chicken keeping, which I refer to as 'the architecture' of chicken keeping. I will describe the diverse sites of chicken keeping, including the living environments of chickens and ways of humans to secure and contain chickens, and the activities of chicken keepers in the virtual site.

4 The Architecture of chicken keeping

This chapter will examine aspects of the material side of the socio-material relationship by exploring the material culture related to chicken keeping. This will include objects and equipment chicken keepers need for the care of their chickens, and objects which are not directly used for their chickens but related to the activity of keeping these animals. It is based on the literature from Bettany and Kerrane (2011), Mullin (2013), and Grier (2014) and material I sourced from my virtual ethnography.

I will explore and discuss the material culture related to chicken keeping covering objects and equipment chicken keepers need for the care of their chickens (paraphernalia) and objects which are not directly used for the chickens but are related to the activity of keeping these animals (memorabilia). All objects related and used for chickens and humans, which are related to this human-animal relationship make up the structure, the architecture, of keeping chickens.

4.1 Material culture and consumption

The academic literature on material culture is vast, from the earliest archaeological studies to the most recent explorations of its significances through the lenses of postmodern cultural studies. Here I will focus on one particular area from the wide field of material culture studies, that of consumption. Consumer and consumption studies were initially based on research surrounding economic and productivistic theories, such as those, in the 1950s based on the works by Marx. Influenced by the material turn of the 1980s the field evolved and gained a new dimension and with it new methods and

approaches: the emphasis now lay on the relationships people had to objects and how material culture in turn influenced peoples' attitudes and choices [see for example works of anthropologists such as (Douglas 1978; Appadurai 1986; Miller 1987; Howes 1996)].

According to Dietler "consumption is a material social practice involving the utilization of objects (or services)" (Dietler 2010, 209). The field is now characterized by the study of a diversity of consumption patterns and practices, such as the analysis of fashion and clothing styles (Banerjee & Miller 2003; Allman 2004), furniture (Edwards 1996), household items, memorabilia and cars (Solomon 1992) among many other examples. The approaches towards studying these phenomena are equally diverse: researchers compare consumption on a temporal and spatial levels, they track consumer goods through their production and consumption life cycles and study consumption patterns across different cultures. The goal is to learn how objects are used and the relationships people have with objects and to use this knowledge "in the construction of identity and in the politics of daily life." (Dietler 2010, 228). Further, Dietler concludes that this approach allows us to re-evaluate popular culture "as a domain of consequent agency rather than simply a banal and decadent distraction or a mystification of capitalism" (2010, 228).

As previously discussed (e.g. in the Introduction and chapter 7) a great variety of material culture related to chicken keeping exists. Some of these objects have been created for the commercial chickens as pets market, such as chicken swings, toys, signs. Other objects have changed and come in greater varieties due to the recent trend in urban and sub-urban chicken keeping and the new demand in equipment for keeping small flocks. Grier's (2014) discussion of the material culture of pet keeping in America presents several parallels to the consumer market related to chickens which I will discuss in course of this

chapter. According to Grier, the study of the objects related to pet keeping are a “useful method for parsing the evolving relationships between people and the animals they live with at home” (Grier 2014, 124).

4.2 Paraphernalia

I define the paraphernalia of chicken keeping as the things and equipment UK chicken keepers use and believe that they need for this activity. There are many lists of the essential equipment which experienced chicken keepers create and publish online in blogs and articles and in self-authored chicken keeping manuals that I was given by chicken keepers who authored them. Cawthray (2013) for example, lists besides the chicken house, a torch, scissors, toenail clippers, a nail file, an antiseptic spray, feeding syringes, petroleum jelly, cotton buds, a purple spray, a pet carrier or dog crate, and latex gloves as “essential kit for the chicken keeper” in his article with the same heading. Some of these objects do not necessarily come to mind when one reflects on articles required for keeping chickens.

The collection of equipment and things chicken keepers own and use for their chickens, has changed over time: chicken keepers today have a wider variety of things they use for their care (examples from list above are toenail clipper, antiseptic spray, pet carrier, and purple spray) and the appearance and material the equipment is made of changed compared to how chickens were kept 20 years ago (e.g. the emergence of colourful plastic chicken coops). In the following section, I will illustrate this change by examining today’s material culture of chicken keeping and by offering examples of equipment and other things which characterise the culture of contemporary chicken keepers. I will initially

explore and discuss a category of objects which are often the most expensive purchase chicken keepers make when they begin to keep chickens and the design and qualities of these objects are therefore a much-discussed theme about chicken keepers: the chicken house.

4.2.1 Palaces for chickens

Many consider the chicken house an essential item for keeping chickens and therefore the purchase of a house is often the first step a novice chicken keeper takes [see for example *The Guardian* article 'choosing a chicken coop' (Cawthray 2011)]. The kind of chicken house people choose depends on their requirements (e.g. small garden with vegetable beds, which does not allow free-roaming chickens and makes a larger chicken house necessary) and what kind of attitudes they have towards their chickens. As described in chapter 3, Shannon and Jamie have different attitudes towards their breeding stock and towards chickens which they raise to be sold or to be eaten. While the first category of chicken is kept in more spacious enclosure with access to greenery, the second category of chicken is kept in smaller enclosure, reminiscent of commercial battery cages.

As we do not allow pet animals to choose their own houses and living environments, nor do chickens have the capacity and resources to create and choose their own housing, their keepers decide for them what they believe is suitable. In a radio programme with the topic Animal Architecture (BBC Radio 4 2014), Williams, the producer, asked following initial guiding questions:

But how do we, and have we, designed for animals? What kind of architecture results? What are these human interpretations of what we think animals want? And how has our understanding of the natural world changed the kinds of environments we make for them? (BBC Radio 4 2014).

Following these important notions, the choice of chicken housing and other human-made architecture related to chicken keeping could reveal what chicken keepers believe their chickens crave, but also contains inherently the chicken keepers' needs and desires related to their chickens. The architecture related to the living space enables the chicken keepers to *keep* chickens – keep them where they are and keep them secure and alive. Chickens must not roam freely and they must not be killed by predators or threatened by their natural environment. The house protects the chickens from weather and extreme temperatures while providing the chicken a space to perch safely at night. The containment of chickens for the protection of the garden and especially the flowerbeds



Figure 14 The Nogg (Source: Nogg n.d.)

and vegetable patches is often an equally important incentive for keepers to invest in housing and fencing for their chickens.

There is a wide choice of chicken houses available, as diverse as the chicken keepers' relationships towards their chickens. There are chicken houses, which besides serving the obvious function of housing the animals, also decorate the keeper's garden, therefore aesthetically pleasing them. Wooden houses with decorative carvings and paint, visually pleasing enclosures, which are reminiscent of large aviaries, or picket fences belong to this category of animal architecture, which is built not only for restricting and securing the animals but also to visually please humans (see Figures 14 to 17, 20 and 21). This turns the chicken house into a consumer good for the consumption of both animals and humans (see also chapter 5, the Growhampton chickens' enclosure was chosen among other things due to its pleasing aesthetics). Lucinda Lambton's book on the architecture created



Figure 15 Chicken house with built-in enclosure (Source: Flytesofancy n.d.-a)

for animals, *Palaces for Pigs* (2011), which also inspired this section heading, illustrates

clearly that carefully planned architecture for the containment and care of animals has a long tradition. She features in her books descriptions and photographs of elaborate poultry housing, including a self-proclaimed Egyptian stone pyramid for poultry at Tong in Shropshire built in 1842. The book also includes the first egg battery farm, Kings Langley, in Hertfordshire that was finished in 1932 and, unlike most modern battery farms, provided the hens with good welfare conditions. This first battery farm included “‘sun parlours’ – large cages protruding from the building – in which the White Leghorns, with plenty of space to strut, could enjoy ‘clement weather’” (Lambton 2011, 41). The Kings Langley facility was partly based on farmers requirements (high productivity of laying hens), but also considered the needs of chickens, giving them the opportunity to spend time outdoors in daylight.

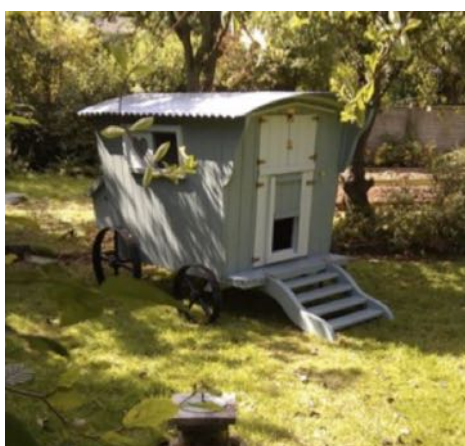


Figure 16 Chicken caravan (Source: Flytesofancy n.d.-c)



Figure 17 Wooden chicken house with heart (Source: Flytesofancy n.d.-b)

Similarly, the chicken palaces that are offered by companies today consider the basic needs of chickens such as those of perching when asleep and laying in dark protected areas in the chicken coop. Typically, chicken houses which are available to small-scale chicken keepers provide space for between two and 15 chickens. The pet chicken keeping market usually does not offer houses for more than 15 chickens (e.g. Flighsofancy with the biggest house for 15 chickens and Omlet with a house for a maximum of 10 chickens).

Chicken keepers I visited who have more than 15 chickens, for example Shannon and Jamie or Amy, had several chicken houses and enclosures of different kinds.

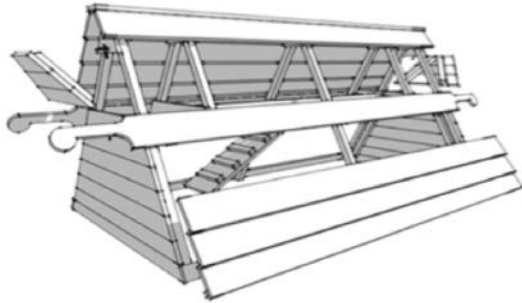


Figure 18 Plan for a chicken ark (Source: DIY chicken coops n.d.)



Figure 19 Jill's chicken house and enclosure



Figure 20 Chicken aviary (Source: Framebow n.d.)



Figure 21 Chicken aviary 2 (Source: Framebow n.d.)

Examples of decorative chicken houses, which are purchased as much for the chicken keeper as for the chickens, are the Nogg and the chicken places (see Figures 20 and 21). The Nogg (see Figure 14) is a wooden, minimalistic chicken house shaped like an Egg. It is advertised as “A stylish & sculptural piece of garden furniture with breakfast thrown in!” on their website (Nogg n.d.). This clearly indicates that it does not fulfil primarily the function of housing animals but as a decorative garden “furniture” which results in free, fresh food – the human needs and desires are the primary concern. The fact that the Nogg has been featured in several design and architecture magazines [e.g. The Vogue UK, Inhabitat.com and California House + Design magazine as cited on Nogg website (n.d.)]

reinforces this concept of the chicken house as a designer garden furniture, rather than as object serving the primary function of providing living space for animals.

Of course, chicken keepers are not only and not always concerned with the look of their chicken house. Most chicken keepers I met focused primarily on the price, functionality and the welfare conditions a house provides their chickens with. An example for a popular functional type of a chicken house is the wooden chicken ark, which keepers often buy, but due to its simple design also self-build (such as Jill, see Figures 18 for a design used by Jill). The ark provides chickens with a space to perch and sleep with a compartment to lay eggs next to it and a space they can use when awake, which is usually on the ground, giving them the opportunity to scratch and dig. The ark promises that it provides the chickens with everything they need in a single purchase.

Jill, whose ark is shown in Figure 19, feels that it does not provide her two hens with enough space while awake. Therefore, as did many other chicken keepers, she purchased a sturdy metal mesh enclosure to protect her hens when they are not left to roam free in her garden. She usually locks them in the enclosure in the evenings and when she is not at home and she lets them out in the mornings and when she spends time at home during the day. As observed in several discussions between chicken keepers on Facebook, some share Jill's sentiment after they purchased their chicken house with attached small enclosure (see for example Figure 15) – the enclosed space for the hens feels too small.

Chicken house and enclosure combinations advertised to be suitable for a specific number of chickens are often deemed too small after a short period of chicken keeping. The houses with attached small enclosures are very popular because they are affordable and

all-in-one combinations. Chicken houses offered by specialized companies usually come with recommendations for the number of chickens one can keep in them. Flightsofancy, for example, advertises a chicken house with a small enclosure (see Figure 15) as “particularly suitable for a small garden with just a couple of chickens but it will house up to 5 Bantam Hens or 3 medium sized hens.” (Flytesofancy n.d.)

The space a chicken needs is very subjective and greatly depends on the keepers’ attitudes towards their chickens. According to ‘Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations 2007’ a maximum of nine hens can be kept per square metre of useable area. The enclosures and houses offered by the chicken coop companies mentioned above certainly fulfil these criteria. Yet, most chicken keepers perceived the basic enclosures as too small for the recommended number of chickens. They often decide to let their birds roam free in their garden for a few hours per day to compensate for less available space during the rest of the daylight hours (this is the case for Alice, Dora, Shannon and Simon among others). Depending on their previous experiences and their attachment to the animals, chicken keepers only let them out of their enclosure while they are at home ready to protect them from predators or during day-time hours when they believe an attack is less likely.

4.2.2 Keeping chickens secured and contained

A much-discussed topic in chicken keeping online forums, in chicken keeping books, magazines and in personal conversations with chicken keepers, is the protection of chickens from predators – especially “from sly Mr Fox” (Raymond 2014). Foxes are the most feared and discussed predators of chickens in the UK and accordingly chicken keepers try to protect their chickens especially from them. Measures for improving the

safety of houses and enclosures from predators are therefore often referred to as fox-proofing. There are several methods for fox-proofing enclosures and chicken houses. Experienced keepers consider the nature and abilities of the predators that could attack their birds. On her blog, an anonymous UK expert small-scale chicken keeper writes:

Foxes usually rip the heads off chickens and will kill as many birds as they can in a frenzy if they manage to get into a run or coop. Foxes usually get into a run by digging and squeezing under a fence or by going over the top of a fence. Fences need to be buried at least 8 inches deep with the wire then curled flat outwards by another 8 inches. They can clear a 5 foot fence with ease. Remember foxes are more like cats than dogs and can jump! (Keeping-chickens n.d.-a)

In a Facebook post one seemingly inexperienced chicken keeper asked the community about how to protect chickens from “Mr Fox”. While some respondents advised the keeper to dig in the ground around the enclosure and bury the fence to prevent the fox from digging and crawling beneath it, others advised the use of electric fencing.

Another electric option for the protection of the chickens from predators is the use of automatic door openers. Automatic door openers open the door of the chicken house in the early morning and close the door shortly after sunset, replacing the need to the chicken keepers to get up early and remember to lock them up (also referred to as “putting them to bed” by Alice) in time. Some chicken keepers consider completely different approaches, adopting methods traditionally used for other pets such as this question on the feasibility of using microchips for chickens (comment as seen online in a discussion forum):

I was wondering if you can get fox and rodent proof automatic doors that work on the same idea as a cat flap that detects a micro-chip? I thought about getting one of the automatic doors that is on a timer but worry that someone will get shut out.

The automatic door openers, the microchips, the chicken house in a large enclosure and the daily locking in/letting out routines are all methods to protect chickens from the attack of foxes, yet keep them in good welfare conditions with as much space during daytime hours as possible. Even keepers with strict routines sometimes loose chickens to a predator. People who lost chickens to a fox or other predator and who are active Facebook group members tend to create posts grieving for their chickens. When they grieve for chickens they sometimes refer to them going to the “rainbow bridge”, pet heaven, a term used by pet keepers in the US and UK (Rohrer 2010). The following examples were found in a Facebook group for UK chicken keepers. Both chicken keepers mourned the death of their chickens in relation to a fox attack.

Mr Fox visited today :(Luckily didn't take all our ladies. Belle is indoors safe and sound enjoying some treats. RIP Rosie and Beth X.

The second post by a chicken keeper mourning the death of their chickens, which was found in the same Facebook group:

My brave little pooch saved 5 of my chickens and both ducks. My first fox attack. Completely my fault falling asleep and not locking them away [...] My poor Logo

didn't make it. Fly high little lady to rainbow bridge (I know it was my fault I don't need comments right now telling me so) I hate myself.

In these instances, chickens are mourned for as individuals with a biography. These quotes (all sourced from UK-based chicken keepers) contain the names of attacked chickens, expressions of guilt related to losing the chickens and a lack of protection of them, and finally in the second quote a reference to the rainbow bridge, pet heaven.

The other type of chicken keeper, which I have highlighted across other chapters (chapters 6 and 7), is equally affected by predator attacks but deals with it in a different way. This type of chicken keeper, with a more hands-off approach (such as Mark and Luis) accepts that predators might “take a few” at one point and does not take as meticulous fox-proofing measures to prevent these attacks. Luis for example, keeps hens of laying breeds in rural England and only possesses a small, freestanding chicken house without an enclosed run. The chicken house remains open most nights, but overall the fox does not attack often enough for Luis to change his approach towards keeping chickens. The loss of a hen every month is acceptable to him. Another example of a chicken keeper, who does not mourn the loss of an individual chicken, is Zoe who I briefly met through a common friend. Zoe, a lecturer in her mid-thirties, told me that she got hens a few months previously, but that a fox took three of her five hens only weeks after she got them. When I inquired if she was sad about the loss of her chickens she told me that she was rather frustrated because the layers cost 30 pounds each and this meant that she lost the money of the “investment” without getting anything in return (presumably eggs). Chicken keepers generally have to make a balance between how much they value the individual

chickens on the one hand and on the other hand the, often costly, methods of protecting their chickens and making their enclosures fox-proof.

Omlet is a company specialising in fox-proof chicken houses and enclosures, such as their especially popular product, the Eglu. All chicken keepers I visited were aware of Omlet and their products and the company takes a special place in today's chicken keeping culture. The next section is therefore dedicated to discussing the Eglu, Omlet's online platform and their place in today's small-scale chicken keeping culture.

4.2.3 Omlet and the Eglu

So far, in this and previous chapters, I have stated that the modern way of keeping chickens in the UK has created (and to some level was created by) a new consumer market. There is a demand for consumer goods related to chicken keeping and there are numerous companies in the UK and other countries, especially the US, who offer products for small-scale chicken keepers eager to purchase. This did not remain unnoticed and Squier (2011), Bettany and Kerrane (2011), Potts (2012) and Mullin (2013) have questioned whether the modern, often urban chicken keeping trend is an extension of "consumer capitalism, a system in which even resistance to consumption spawns evermore commodity consumption, but legitimized by association with caring for animals and the environment" (Mullin 2013, 208).



Figure 22 The egg hatch of the Omlet (Source: Omlet n.d.-f)



Figure 23 The dropping tray of the Omlet (Source: Omlet n.d.-f)

When considering the potential of the urban chicken keeping trend as extension of consumer capitalism as in the quote above, Omlet, a company specialised in UK chicken keepers comes to mind first. Omlet is an example of a company that discovered this new unexplored market early on in 2004 and who to some extent drove the growth of the numbers of small-scale chicken keepers in the UK. Their first product, the Eglu, was developed by design graduates of the Royal College of the Arts in London. They designed a chicken coop made of polymer in a variety of strong bright colours, which “made it simpler to keep chickens in the garden” (Omlet n.d.-a). In 2011 their website contained the following statement advertising the product and apparently directed towards people new to chicken keeping with an interest in healthy food and sustainability (quote from Bettany & Kerrane 2011, 1750 and has since been removed from the Omlet website):

The last 20 years have seen many changes to the system of food production. The philosophy of ‘more for less’ has prevailed, resulting in a drop of standards in animal welfare. More and more people are beginning to express interest in the ethical origin of their food. Buying organic or free-range is an excellent start, but why not go that one step further and keep your own chickens!

Their emphasis lies on ethical and healthy foods rather than on the relationship with the animal itself. The productive quality of the chickens stands in the foreground. Omlet was not the first company specializing in small-scale chicken keepers, but it certainly is the most commercially successful one today. Almost half of chicken keepers I visited had one or more Eglus in their garden (see for example Figure 24).

Other companies soon started to produce chicken houses made of polymers and recycled plastics. One advantage of plastic chicken houses is that red mites, harmful, blood sucking invertebrates, which live in small cracks of the chicken house are less able to infest smooth plastic surfaces compared to traditionally-used wooden houses. A severe red mite infestation can threaten the survival of a flock and therefore combatting this pest and ways to prevent an infestation receive great attention by chicken keepers. As a research participant in a research project by Bethany and Kerrane (2011, 1751) focusing on the Eglu with the pseudonym 'Sweetonchooks' put it:

The Eglu is a 5* hotel for chickens!! My Eglu came with a fox proof run and it's maintenance free. It is twin walled which makes it warm in winter and cool in summer. Since it all comes apart for cleaning, there are no nooks for red mite to hide in.



Figure 24 The largest size of the Eglu model

The low-maintenance aspect of the Eglu was especially attractive to the chicken keepers I visited. Several (such as Alice, Hillary and Amy) explained to me that they pressure-clean their Eglus every couple of months. The excrement of the chickens can be disposed of by removing a plastic tray that collects the chicken droppings from the perches above (see Figure 23). Eggs can be collected without engaging with the chickens and without entering the space the chickens occupy as the hatch can be accessed from outside (see Figure 22).



Figure 25 Chickens in High-Visibility vests offered by Omlet (Source: Omlet n.d.-d)



Figure 26 Chicken on swing from Omlet (Source: Omlet n.d.-d)

Among the products Omlet offers toys for the entertainment of the chickens and products which some chicken keepers deem to be unnecessary (online discussions, Simon, in conversations with people at the community farm I stayed at) such as a chicken high-visibility vest (see Figure 25) or a heat pad for “chilly nights” as some chicken keepers are thought to need “eggstra reassurance to give you peace of mind” according to Omlet (from the product description from Omlet’s website). The chicken swing is another product which I discovered at several chicken keepers’ establishments (such as Katie and Holly) and which has the purpose to provide the chickens with additional exercise and keep them occupied (see Figure 26). Omlet also sells chicken treats which encourage

movement and can partly be considered as a toy, such as hanging seed cakes (in heart or flower shapes) especially for the consumption of chickens (as seen on Omlet's website in the 'feed and treats' section) and hollow feed balls which can be filled with grains and which dispense seeds when pecked by the chickens.

As Grier (2014) points out in her study of the material culture of pet keeping, toys for pets are not always for the pleasure of pets. The entertainment of the pet keeper is often equally important. For example, the feed ball which rolls when pecked and dispenses grains or the chicken swing are, when used by the chickens, amusing to watch for the chicken keeper. Holly who has a swing for her chickens, which her friend made for her and who also often purchases chicken treat sticks, said that she finds it entertaining and amusing to watch her hens swing or play with the food toys she gives to them. Similarly, Katie had a mirror placed in the chicken enclosure because she found it amusing to observe her hens in front of the mirror at times appearing to look consciously at their reflection. While it is not clear whether the mirror and swing give chickens pleasure, it is clear that toys are purchased and given to them are, to a great extent, for the amusement of their keepers.

After Omlet established themselves with their first product, the Eglu, they started to offer further services to small-scale chicken keepers, which are popular and were mentioned by small-scale chicken keepers I met and I came across in discussion forums online. Omlet's website does not only function as an online web-store, but also provides chicken keepers with the opportunity to learn about chicken keeping, and discuss and socialise with each other. Omlet offers an advice and discussion forum for chicken keepers and a platform for people to advertise their chicken keeping courses (and in turn find courses

to participate in) and sell their products (including live chickens). Omlet attempt to be a one-stop shop for everything related to chicken keeping.



Figure 27 Screenshot of Omlet's chicken breed section (Source: Omlet n.d.-c)

Omlet's website contains resources for chicken keepers to learn about the care chickens require and about the chicken breeds and varieties. The page 'chicken breeds' for example contains descriptions for most breeds. Omlet invites chicken keepers on the same page to "share your knowledge and love of chickens by uploading a photo of your chicken or leaving a review" (see Figure 27, screenshot of Omlet n.d.-c). As previously discussed in chapter 3, Omlet provides chicken keepers with the opportunity to learn about breeds of chickens and review the breeds according to suggested criteria such as appearance, friendliness, hardiness, eggs and compatibility with a garden. Furthermore this page gives chicken keepers the choice to "Sell Your Chickens" or view "Chickens For Sale". While the reviewing tool, which Omlet offers, is also available for their dog and cat sections (with different categories), the sell your animal option is only available in the chicken section of

the site. This leaves the impression of chickens being treated as a commodity, easily bred, exchangeable, traded and collected, rather than as individual beings a chicken keeper is emotionally attached to.

I have sketched the architecture of the virtual site of Omlet, which chicken keepers use to purchase the essentials for keeping chickens, such as the Eglu and the not-so-essentials, such as treats and entertainment for the chickens. This virtual site contains spaces with detailed information on breeds and the care of chickens. Most interestingly, Omlet also provides chicken keepers with a space to socialise and learn from each other, review breeds, and trade live chickens with each other. Omlet is, however, not the only virtual site for chicken keepers to be active and socialise with each other. In the following section I will discuss some other aspects of the virtual world of chicken keeping such as Facebook, YouTube and chicken keeping blogs.

4.2.4 Digital chicken keeping

While I mentioned the activities of chicken keepers online on several occasions in previous chapters, I have not so far discussed the virtual site as a focus itself. Here I consider the virtual space because the Internet and its architecture, namely its structures and functions and ways of participation and communication between chicken keepers can be considered material manifestations, artefacts of the culture I study [this notion is based on the idiom of co-production as discussed by science and technology studies scholar Jasanoff (2004)]. The Internet is inevitably imbedded in how chickens are kept by small-scale chicken keepers today. While I anticipate that there are some chicken keepers who do not use the Internet and Social Media in relation to chicken keeping, all chicken keepers

I encountered used the Internet for some aspects related to their chickens despite the fact that I had not identified and discovered all of them from online sources.

The blogs, discussion forums, comments, YouTube videos, Facebook groups, commercial sites directly targeted towards the small-scale chicken keeping market, and online newspaper articles and advice columns are all pieces that can tell us more about the culture of small-scale chicken keepers today. While they do not completely reflect all aspects of this culture and relationships people have with their chickens, they help us to understand some aspects of today's manifestation of the practice of chicken keeping and the ways people use the Internet in connection to chicken keeping. Of special interest is the online communication between chicken keepers. The virtual site gives us the opportunity to witness communication between people belonging to the cultures we study. In the case of the small-scale chicken keeping culture there is a lack of prolonged communication between chicken keepers in an offline setting and this is compensated by communication in the virtual site. Several websites I explored provided chicken keepers with the space and tools to communicate with each other. Among them were Facebook and its groups with a focus on chicken keeping, YouTube, discussion forums such as Omlet, blogs authored by individuals, such as *Keeping-Chickens* (n.d.-b) and *The Chicken Street* (Cawthray n.d.), and comment sections of newspaper and magazine articles published online.



Figure 28 An image shared in a chicken related Facebook group in memory of a hen which recently died

I identified Facebook as one of the most important platforms chicken keepers use to communicate with each other today. Seeking advice, selling used equipment and chickens, is equally important to the sharing of experiences and important moments connected to keeping chickens such as the arrival of the first egg or the loss of a hen. I have mentioned tensions people experience caused by differences in their attitudes towards chickens. For example as I will describe in chapter 7, Catherine and Dora expressed being mocked by other chicken keepers for considering their chickens pets and for not being able to cull or eat their chickens. Partly to avoid tension between chicken keepers with different attitudes, there are specific Facebook groups for types of chicken keepers. Besides groups for specialist breeds, which tend to be used by pedigree breeders, there are groups with names such as *Chickens as pets*, *UK Poultry Keepers*, *Utility Poultry Keepers UK*, *The Poultry Pages*, *Natural Chicken Keeping*, *Backyard Chickens UK*, *Chicken Chat*, *Ex Battery Hens* and *Cockerel trader*. People within these groups generally broadly

agree on the attitudes they have towards their chickens. Members of the *Chicken as pets* group, for example, tend to not openly talk about chicken meat recipes nor do they talk about ending the lives of ill chickens. Members of this group tend to visit the vet with their ill chickens and mourn their deaths individually when their chickens die, often sharing a picture of them in the group (see Figure 28). People react with condolences, emoticons and virtual kisses ('xx').

Members who do not follow these general rules and taboos are warned and banned and their posts are deleted by dedicated group moderators. Chicken keepers also share positive events in discussion forums and in Facebook groups, such as the arrival of the first eggs, the discovery of a double yolker (an especially large egg with two yolks), hatching of chicks, the survival from a disease, the addition of a new hen or cockerel and images of chickens enjoying diverse kinds of food treats. Other chicken keepers often react to this category of posts with emoticons and positive comments.

Dora provides an interesting case of a chicken keeper who started to use a virtual site of chicken keeping after keeping chickens for several decades. Dora, who is in her mid-50s, has been keeping chickens since childhood. She and Catherine live in neighbouring villages and they frequently chat about their chickens when they occasionally encounter each other. When Dora introduced me to Catherine, she inquired about some of Catherine's individual hens using the names and was well aware of the history of her friend's flock. Dora told me that her attitude towards keeping chickens changed only recently and that she was not always interested in chickens in this way. Dora kept a few hens and one cockerel when I visited her, but she used to keep more than 100 chickens of several breeds, which she bred and sold to chicken keepers a few years ago. After she stopped

breeding chickens, she reduced the size of her flock drastically. This coincided with her new friendship and chats about chickens with Catherine. Both of these factors led, according to Dora, to her new perspective of chickens as individuals of interest, rather than chickens as a flock and commodity to be sold. Catherine made Dora aware of the Facebook groups dedicated to chicken keeping which she liked to visit, which also contributed to Dora to view her chickens in a different way. She now reads about and shares pictures of her chickens online and “learned so many new things about chickens!” She told me that she started to sit outside with her chickens during the day, drinking tea and watching them move around the garden. As an example to illustrate her new attitude towards her chickens she communicated to me that she perceived something new in her cockerel’s behaviour in reaction to her feeding it treats:

I noticed that my cockerel does not like it when I feed his girls directly. They are *his* girls and he wants to be a gentleman and offer the crumbs to them. He rubs his beak on the ground and makes this sound to show them where the crumbs are. He does not like it when I feed it to them directly...he wants to give it to them.

Dora describes the dynamics in her flock in an anthropomorphic way. While the smaller number of chickens she now keeps probably is a reason for her shifting attitudes, it is partly reinforced by the new discourse she is exposed to online and her frequent conversations with Catherine, who I consider mostly a pet chicken keeper (I elaborate on Catherine’s attitudes on several occasions in this thesis).

A major function of Facebook, which I will describe in chapter 5 in more detail, is its use as a tool for acquiring practical knowledge, feedback and information in place of a vet visit. Chicken keepers who notice strange behaviour in their chickens, such as awkward movements or unfamiliar sounds often take short videos of their chickens and share it in those groups (videos and pictures are shared and advice is given in all of the groups, independently of their general attitude towards chickens). Other symptoms are often described or shown in photos such as scaly legs, lice or images of chicken faeces. In comments the community helps to identify the condition and gives advice on the next steps of action.



Figure 29 YouTube video by Warwickshire chicken channel (Source: Warwickshire chickens 2012)

Instructional YouTube videos also help (especially novice) chicken keepers to acquire new skills through people explaining and demonstrating how to catch a chicken, how to hold a chicken, how to clip the wings of a chicken, and even how to kill and prepare a chicken for consumption among many other things. The video (see Figure 29) on how to hold a chicken published by a small business based in Warwickshire has been viewed more than 23,000 times at the time of writing this chapter.

The virtual site gives chicken keepers the opportunity to connect with, and learn from, each other. The communication between each other enables chicken keepers to not only purchase and consume ready-to-use objects on the commercial market, but to improvise, do-it-themselves and to repurpose other things. Chicken keepers share ideas, often through images, about recycling and repurposing things they use for the chickens. In the following section I share and discuss some of the images and ideas of chicken keepers that I encountered during my virtual ethnography on Facebook and Preloved. Preloved is a trading website, similar to Gumtree and Ebay and is also popular with pet keepers who use it to trade live animals and accessories related to the care of their pets.

4.2.5 Repurposing and DIY culture

In contrast to Mullin (2013), who only encountered few small-scale chicken keepers with factory-made chicken houses, I only rarely encountered chicken keepers who designed and made their chicken houses on their own (the only example is Jill who made a chicken ark, see section 4.2.1.). There are however numerous design plans for chicken houses available online, in chicken keeping books [some books dedicated exclusively to design plans, such as Roberts (1997)] or in poultry keeping magazines such as the *Your Chickens* magazine, which also hosted a chicken house design plan competition. More often than building a chicken house from scratch, people purchase new ready-to-use houses or repurpose other objects and use them as housing (such as Wendy houses or wardrobes).



Figure 30 Tree logs, a swing, and a mirror for the entertainment of the chickens

People use old garden sheds, old Wendy houses, but also repurpose compost bins,



Figure 31 Trampoline repurposed as chicken enclosure (Source: Preloved advisement)

wooden shipping crates or old wardrobes [e.g. as described in Hollander (2010)] among other things. They have to invest time and resources to make these objects fit the requirements of a house for chickens (e.g. adding perches inside the house, creating access for the chickens to the area, and adding some ventilation slots). A chicken keeper on Facebook, who shared a photo of a Wendy house, which she repurposed for her chickens, added in a comment that using old things for her chickens is the “greener” way

compared to buying a new house and that she is sick of buying new things for her home. While other chicken keepers online frequently commented on the high prices in chicken houses, leading them to explore DIY paths and repurposing other things, the person who repurposed her children's Wendy house seems to not only be interested in spending less money, but also takes an anti-consumerist stance, wanting to avoid the consumption related to chicken keeping.

The repurposing culture among chicken keepers is not just limited to chicken housing. Chicken keepers share ideas especially in the virtual space, related to other chicken keeping paraphernalia, such as nesting boxes (e.g. drawers), toys (e.g. CDs or plastic bottles, see e.g. mirrors and chicken swing in Figures 30), storage boxes (e.g. unused refrigerators or freezers as described in *Chicken keeping for Dummies*) and enclosures (see trampoline in Figure 31) from objects with an originally different purpose.

Similarly, a variety of health-related products are available, which are originally meant for the treatment of other animals but which have been repurposed and used for treating chickens. One of these products is Tylan that is an antibiotic which was developed for the treatment of health conditions in cattle, but now is also used for poultry (see Figure 32, I am helping a chicken keeper to apply the medicine in a syringe).

Another interesting case is the use of Suprelorin, a contraceptive hormone implant for



Figure 32 Treating an ill cockerel with Tylan

dogs. Chicken keepers use this hormonal implant on hens that have a condition preventing them from developing eggshells, leading to half-finished eggs remaining in the hen and eventually to dangerous, deadly infections. Suprelorin impedes these hens from developing eggs and therefore improves their condition in the long-term. The following comment is from a chicken keeper comforting another keeper on the Omlet advice forum. The chicken keeper tried to save her chicken with the implant and visited a vet who performed the procedure – yet the hen still passed away the next day:

Your Beryl had a natural passing and was very much loved. I'm thinking that if she was ready to go, the strain of the anaesthesia for the implant may have been too much for her. As it was she passed on peacefully at home, with her friends. How we'd all choose to go.

The chicken did not only receive a hormone implant but also anaesthesia. Hormone implants are not developed nor marketed directly for individual chickens, as Suprelorin is for dogs. Ivermectin, a lice treatment for budgies and parrots is also used by chicken keepers and considered one of the most effective treatments, but means that the hen's eggs should not be consumed. This medication is developed for traditional pets but using them for chickens indicates that there is a shift in the attitudes chicken keepers have towards the animals they keep (see also chapter 7 'Edible pets – transgressing boundaries' with several instances when chickens are classified between these categories). As I have described above, the commercial pet market discovered and exploited these changing attitudes for profit. In addition to the material culture discussed above, the use of pet medicine for individual chickens is evidence that a demand for products that treat chickens as individuals that are of value exists.

4.2.6 Making sense of the paraphernalia of chicken keeping

Besides chicken houses, there are several other objects that most chicken keepers possess for their chickens: drinkers and feeders are available in multiple different designs, depending on the size and capacity providing feed and water for the flock for several days. Buckets, storage bins and boxes (containing feed, treats and wood shavings), garden gloves, a rake, scrapers, garden boots, wiring, robes, tree branches and stumps (for exercising and entertainment), wood chips, a compost bin, wheelbarrow, a shuffle are among many other things that I often saw at the establishments of the chicken keepers I visited. These items all require hands-on work and create an idea of chicken keeping as outdoor farming activity.

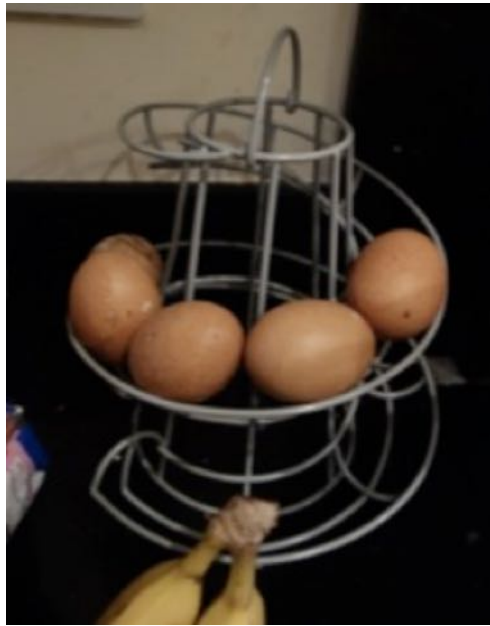


Figure 33 Egg skelter

On the other hand, there are also clinical objects, used for the health care of chickens which tell a different story of what chicken keeping entails: Purple spray, an anti-pecking spray for deterring pecking by other hens; gasoline and Vaseline, a common treatment of the scaly legs condition caused by mites; Flubenvet, a dewormer that was frequently mentioned; Diatomaceous earth for the

treatment of conditions caused by lice and red mites; a blowtorch to exterminate red mites in the chicken house; olive oil for the treatment of the blocked crop condition and cider vinegar a “general 'pick-me-up' for chickens” (Totally-tack n.d.) and which many chicken keepers swear by (as seen with Jill, Dora, Stephanie and many more).

During my conversations with Alice, the retired schoolteacher who has been keeping chickens for more than a decade and who keeps two Bantams at the moment, she mentioned that this clinical side of chicken keeping, which she discovered when reading a book on chicken keeping, initially put her off. She told me that the description of the illnesses, such as crop related issues, lice infestations and the regularly suggested weekly health checks left her feeling overwhelmed and gave her the impression that chicken keeping is complicated and impractical. When her sister-in-law started keeping chickens and they talked about it, she realised that it can be simple: “You don’t need all this stuff from the beginning. You slowly get to know them and you understand them without the books. If you see that they are itchy, they probably have lice and you get the powder.”

Shannon and Mark, both chicken keepers in rural areas, who have been living with

chickens since childhood, expressed a similar opinion. They both mentioned that they feel that the amount of things some chicken keepers purchase to keep chickens is exaggerated and that you do not necessarily need special chicken keeping equipment. Shannon found a broom on offer on a commercial website online, which was targeted at chicken keepers and told me that she was amused to see in the product description that this broom was specifically designed for the activity of chicken keeping, which she believed was “utter nonsense”. She said that any outdoor broom would do and that these companies only tried to make money and get novice chicken keepers to buy “all this crap”.

All objects and equipment described so far are used and kept outdoors or stored away from sight such as in a storage bin in the case of medications for poultry. Some items related to chicken keeping are, however, kept indoors. Some of these objects have a purpose and are especially used in the kitchen and connected to the storage and preparation of eggs, such as the egg skelters (see Figure 33) or even more common, egg cups such as in Figure 48.

The possession of chickens also creates an unanticipated material culture in the human sphere belonging to what I categorise here as memorabilia. Objects belonging to this category seem to find their way into the chicken keeper’s home without their planning. This also applied to myself as I recently realised that I was surrounded by figurines, drawings, refrigerator magnets, a wall calendar and other small objects, such as a key holder and bottle opener, all in shape of a chicken or depicting a chicken and all things I classify as memorabilia.

4.3 Memorabilia

According to the Oxford dictionary, memorabilia are defined as “objects kept or collected because of their associations with memorable people or events” (Stevenson 2010b, 1050). Some memorabilia in chicken keepers’ homes were kept in memory of individual chickens. One chicken keeper, Alice, kept a foot ring, used for identifying individual chickens, of one of her favourite hens which passed away. She kept it in her jewellery box and told me that whenever she comes across it, she thinks of her hen. Figure 34 shows several frames containing the photographs of chickens belonging to Catherine. Catherine, a 50-year chicken keeper who lives in a large house with lots of outdoor space in rural England, placed these photographs in memory of her chickens in her sitting room, with the dark black frames signifying grief. When I asked Catherine about these photographs, she offered information about each individual chicken, providing me with their name and shared their story (for example “Adrian, a Bantam Silkie cockerel, died lonely after his hen passed away and he was bullied a lot from the rest of the flock before his death” quote by Catherine) and their relations to each other.

Objects without a direct association to individual chickens, but related rather to the affinity to chickens in general are also classified as memorabilia. There is an abundance of objects related to the activity of chicken keeping and to the fact that people have close relationships to chickens. Chicken keepers acquire, collect and are gifted these objects and often keep them inside their houses, away from the chickens living space and the daily routines related to the care of these animals. They do not necessarily have a clear purpose, yet all chicken keepers I encountered and visited, including myself, had such memorabilia (see for example Figures 36-38, 40, and 47).



Figure 34 Framed images of chickens in memory of chickens which died

Among them are decorative items, drawings, or figurines depicting chickens. Other objects serve a purpose, but also feature a chicken or egg, such as mugs, table clothes, aprons and teapots, wall calendars (see for example Figures 33, 39, 41-45, 48 and 49). These objects are categorised as memorabilia, because their purpose is not directly connected to the activity of chicken keeping, as it is the case with for example eggcups. When discussing these objects with chicken keepers during my visits, they often gave similar responses. Holly, for example, told me that she liked the numerous cups, drawings on the walls, and figurines featuring chickens because it gave her a “homely feeling”.

A reoccurring theme is also the identity change chicken keepers go through. Jill, Stephanie, Simon, Mark and I are defined on some level by our affinity and association with chickens. Through my involvement in the Growhampton chicken project, I became the “the chicken lady”. Holloway (2001) and Wolch and Emel (1995) discuss the cultural

practice of reproducing human identity by relating to a specific human-animal relationship, such as Holloway (2001) exemplifies, dog-walkers and horse-riders. I became the chicken lady and my university identity changed significantly with people calling out loud “it’s the chicken lady” on several occasions when they met me walking on campus. University staff smiled at me when they found out about my involvement in the project and from then onwards asked me about what was new with the chickens every time they met me. Chicken keepers such as Jill for example or several chicken keepers online observed in Facebook groups, stated that people refer to them as ‘crazy chicken ladies’. The only male equivalent I encountered is ‘chicken aficionado’, such as Mark who I mentioned in chapter 3, who also defines himself on some level in relation to his life-long fascination of chicken keeping.

As suggested previously, friends and family started gifting me chicken-related objects



Figure 35 Table sets with drawings of a chicken

because they appreciated and acknowledged my connection to chickens. Similarly, Jill told me that much of the memorabilia in her house were gifts from friends and family. With these objects in their homes, the activity of chicken keepers is extended: they do not only

keep live chickens but they also keep a large number of depictions of chickens which they are surrounded by in their daily lives. The chickens in a way, are therefore represented both in the indoors and the outdoors of their keepers' homes, bridging the threshold. In Chapter 7 I argue that chickens inevitably take a different place in their keepers' lives compared to conventional pets, partly due to the physical daily separation. The chickens spend their lives in the garden, in the outdoors and the keepers in the inside of their houses for most of their days. As I suggested above however this physical separation does not necessarily imply that the chickens do not matter. The chickens take a space in their keeper's lives. The keeper takes care of them on a daily basis, thinking of them soon after they wake up in the morning, hearing them in the outdoors during the day. The memorabilia of chicken keeping provides us with yet more evidence of how the chickens remain on their keepers' minds at all times. The keepers drink their tea out of a chicken cup; they cook wearing an apron with drawings of chickens on it; they eat their dinners on table sets with depictions of chickens and they use a wall calendar featuring a different breed of chicken for each month of the year – all welcome reminders of the creatures which they keep in their gardens.

I have introduced several kinds of objects and infrastructure that are part of the practice of chicken keeping. As previously discussed, Shannon (and others, such as Mark and people who I referred to in the section on DIY and repurposing culture) implied that the current trend of chicken keeping relies on the consumption of unnecessary equipment and things encouraged by a pet commercial market.

4.4 Consuming chickens

As elaborated in the section on Omlet, some researchers who have studied small-scale chicken keepers (Bettany & Kerrane, 2011; Mullin, 2013; Squier, 2011) suggest that the consumer culture related to modern chicken keeping stands in contrast to the pro-environmental and anti-consumerist attitudes chicken keepers often hold (Bettany & Kerrane 2011). Mullin (2013) wonders whether the modern small-scale chicken keeping trend is merely an extension of consumer capitalism. While Mullin studied the US chicken keeping culture, her train of thought also rings true for the UK when we consider the diversity of material culture and consumer goods, which is used and consumed and which has been introduced in this chapter. Mullin, however, rejects the idea of considering the small-scale chicken keeping trend merely as a fad and new trend of a consumer society. She argues that

their current popularity, however, is more complicated than that of the latest mobile phone, with more potential for encouraging worthwhile questions about environments, animal welfare, political geography, relationships among species, and even neoliberal economics (Mullin 2013, 208).

Keeping chickens and the purchase and consumption of things related to keeping chickens appears to be in trend, with evidence in the high numbers of published articles relating to chicken keeping and the Good Life in daily newspapers in recent years. Further evidence is the development of a consumer market focused especially on small-scale chicken keepers, including materials for the care of chickens such as housing, but also items relating to this hobbyist activity for human consumption, such as memorabilia, the

emergence of new niche books and magazines such as *Your Chickens* focused especially on small-scale chicken keepers (rather than with a focus on fancy breeds for poultry shows such as the *Fancy Fowl* magazine has).

Similarly to Mullin's (2013) argument which I described above, I discovered and illustrated that there is more to the recent trend of keeping chickens than the accumulation of consumer goods (which includes the actual chickens). Keeping chickens requires continuous effort and dedication. It became clear that interacting and living with chickens, changes something in the keeper. As I will discuss in other chapters people learn to understand and interpret the behaviour of chickens (they think *in* chicken, rather than think *like* a chicken). They change their attitudes towards them and become often closely attached to the individual chickens. These aspects of the chicken keeping trend extend the effects a mere consumption and exchange of goods usually has on people. While a large proportion of the estimated 750,000 households keeping chickens might have stopped keeping chickens after a short while, the chicken keepers I interviewed often appreciated both the consumerist and non-consumerist aspects such as the close engagements with the animals which are both producing food and considered food themselves.

4.5 Concluding thoughts and chapter summary

The title of this chapter 4 'The Architecture of chicken keeping' not only refers to the physical, built environment related to chicken keeping, but also to structures and objects as part of a broader definition of 'architecture'. Part of my discussion of the architecture of chicken keeping are the infrastructures and elements that are typically used in relation

to the activity of keeping chickens. My goal was to draw a map of the diversity of social and physical structures and objects related to the keeping of these animals and to use them to show how chicken keepers relate to their chickens.

I described a diversity of chicken housing and enclosures that chicken keepers use to protect and secure their chickens. I have shown that the shape and kinds of chicken housing do not only reflect what chicken keepers believe their chickens need and require for their welfare but also their own human interests such as restricting the chickens' movements in the garden, low-maintenance attributes, and using it as decorative features in a garden.

I also explored paths of communication between chicken keepers and sites of learning about the care for chickens, especially the virtual site, which is part of the infrastructure of chicken keeping. YouTube, Facebook, blogs and comment sections are all places where digital chicken keeping takes place and are invisible to the outside but important aspects for some chicken keepers. These sites inform but also influence the attitudes of chicken keepers towards their chickens.

I mentioned material culture extending into the house of the keepers, but without a direct application for the care of the chickens – the memorabilia of chicken keeping which I argued are an extension of the keeping of chickens, resulting with the chickens not only being kept outdoors, but finding its way in the indoors with the keepers. Finally, I argued the chicken keeping is also, but not exclusively a consumerist activity that enables chicken keepers to gain new perspectives towards issues related to eating meat and attitudes

towards animals and more generally the sustainability of food production and animal welfare.

The next chapter, 'Apprenticeship in chicken keeping', explores how keepers learn and become skilled in the practice of chicken keeping. I chose to describe processes of enskilment on the basis of my involvement in Growhampton, a food-sustainability project based at the University of Roehampton. The study of the Growhampton chicken project and its public nature also allowed me to explore diverse attitudes and behaviour people had towards these chickens, leading to questions about the classification of animals and animal ethics.



Figure 36 Two decorative wooden hens



Figure 37 A painting of a cockerel



Figure 38 Lego figure in chicken suit



Figure 39 Wine glasses with chicken figure

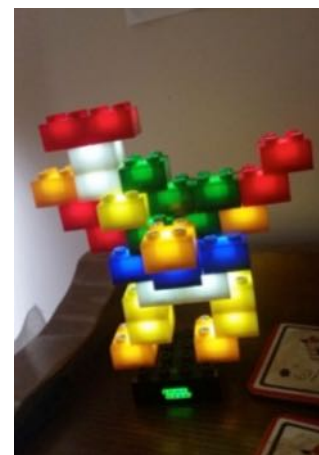


Figure 40 Lego chicken figure



Figure 41 Door-stopper chicken



Figure 42 Decorative plate with painted chicken



Figure 43 Hooks featuring chickens



Figure 44 Mugs featuring chickens



Figure 45 Bell with a cockerel figure on the top



Figure 46 Two mugs featuring chickens



Figure 47 Chicken figures



Figure 48 Egg cup featuring a chicken



Figure 49 Jug with chicken drawings

5 Apprenticeship in chicken keeping

This chapter examines the processes and experiences involved in becoming skilled in the practice of chicken keeping by exploring the case of Growhampton, a project based at the University of Roehampton. It is based on literature from Palsson (1994) and Grasseni (2007a; 2009) and on ethnographic material and narratives related to the Growhampton chicken keeping project. It includes material from interviews with people involved in the project; Teresa, Joel and Roehampton staff and volunteers. The ethnographic material I collected is partly autoethnographic because of my personal involvement and participation in the project. Furthermore, the chapter is based on material from my virtual ethnography, which was an important aspect of the process of acquiring skills and practicing activities part of chicken keeping, as I have also previously highlighted.

Growhampton is a food sustainability project based at the University of Roehampton that started to keep chickens during the course of my research. Through my close involvement in the Growhampton chicken project, I was able to discover and describe the paths and processes of how novice chicken keepers become skilled and I could share some of the insights I gained through my participation in the practice I studied. Novice chicken keepers have various ways of learning about the things one needs to keep them healthy and productive, learning to understand their movements and sounds, to interpret changes in their behaviour, and even about how to slaughter them and prepare their meat for consumption. It became evident through conversations with chicken keepers, because of the recent popularity of discussion and advice forums and YouTube videos and finally based on my personal experiences as a chicken keeper, that learning to keep chickens requires far more training than any single book can provide. Part of the learning process

of how to keep chickens seems to be the acquisition of practical knowledge or 'learning-by-doing' as mentioned by an interviewed chicken keeper. Palsson (1994) described in his study of fishermen a learning concept, which I use to understand the ways chicken keepers become skilled.

Palsson's (1994) notion of 'enskilment' is based on the relationship between the knowledgeable expert and the apprentice, the novice. Palsson's theory is informed by theories on practical knowledge and communities of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991). It stands in contrast to normative learning theories which presume a hierarchical relationship between teacher and novice and acquisition of knowledge without active participation, as Palsson (1994) points out: "Learning is not a purely cognitive or cerebral process, a mental reflection on differences in time and space, but is rather grounded in the contexts of practice, involvement and personal engagement" (Palsson 1994, 920). Together with the Growhampton team (most importantly Teresa) and several volunteers, I began keeping chickens and the following will describe some of the key events and experiences gained during this apprenticeship. I will also enumerate the different sources and ways we used to become skilled chicken keepers.

The second argument I make in this chapter developed due to Growhampton's goals and aims as a food-sustainability project. The public nature of keeping chickens at an educational institution meant that others expressed their opinions about the welfare, ethics and aesthetics of how the chickens were kept on campus. Furthermore, and more importantly, Growhampton's primary goal of teaching students about sustainable food production meant that important questions about the attitudes we have towards animals and the ethics of killing animals are raised and discussed in this chapter.

It is important to note that due to the public nature of Growhampton, the involvement of volunteers, and the agenda of Growhampton as a food sustainability project and due to the autoethnographic character of this research site, it cannot be considered a representative case study of the typical small-scale chicken keeping experience. The study of the Growhampton chicken project does however, as I have pointed out above, enable me to illuminate aspects of the enskilment process of novice chicken keepers. Furthermore, the public nature of the Growhampton chicken project brought out differences in attitudes towards chickens, as they were perceived as pets, educational tool, decorative feature, and as food, evoking questions about the boundaries between categories of animal classification and animal ethics.

In the following paragraphs I introduce the Growhampton chicken keeping project and the people involved in it. I then proceed to describe the process of obtaining the chickens for this project at the University of Roehampton.

5.1 [Growhampton](#)

Growhampton is a sustainability project lead by the Roehampton Student Union (RSU). The project's focus lies in promoting healthy and sustainable food choices on campus by involving students practically in growing projects. The vision is to create an 'edible campus' through the expansion of allotment gardens, orchards, the introduction of hens and a pig and the establishment of a café on campus that offers sustainable food options. The project was initially funded by the National Union of Students (NUS) green funds who awarded 25 grants to student unions across England "to develop ambitious greening

projects, leading to step-changes in pro-environmental behaviour across higher education” (National Union of Students n.d.).

In practice, Growhampton grows vegetables and keeps chickens and bees on campus with the help of student volunteers and sells them on a weekly farmers’ market next to the Hive café. The Hive café is the social centre of Growhampton and sells organic and local products, while also financially supporting the food growing aspect of Growhampton. Teresa Sheppard, the Growhampton manager and Joel



Figure 50 Logo of Growhampton

Williams, the growing project co-ordinator, created Growhampton in September 2013. Both, Joel and Teresa are in their early 30s and enthusiastic about inspiring people to spend more time outdoors and teaching them about food sustainability. Teresa was responsible for planning and coordinating the overall activities and partnerships of Growhampton. Before her role at Growhampton, Teresa was involved in several education projects. In an interview she mentioned that she feels that the main thread through all roles, and something she really enjoys doing, is to inspire people to spend more time outdoors and to appreciate nature and the environment. Joel used to work in the commercial farming sector as a soil and growing expert. A year before Growhampton started, Joel became increasingly interested in and fascinated by the urban farming movement and he felt inspired to become more involved in it.

The grounds of the University of Roehampton are a heritage-listed space, which made the planning process and finding space for the growing project difficult. Six months after

Growhampton was established a poly-tunnel and raised bed were constructed close to the Student Union building and Joel started growing vegetables with the help of student volunteers. Twice per week student volunteers and local community members take part in Growhampton sessions. These include learn-to-grow sessions where students can learn about sowing seeds and generally gardening, and harvest sessions where students pick salads and vegetables and subsequently sell them on the weekly market. Usually a group of three to eight people attend the harvest and learn-to-grow sessions with people dropping in and out during the late mornings.

University senior staff supported the Growhampton project throughout the years, freeing space for the growing enterprise and Hive cafe, helping with the required paper work so the project could move forward and later financially supporting the project. The academic departments collaborated with Growhampton on several research and teaching projects, involving both staff and students. Growhampton's Hive café was received positively by students and staff and has been commercially successful to date. At the time I first reached out to Growhampton the project had just had its first-year anniversary.

5.2 Planning the chicken project

In September 2014 I learned about Growhampton's intention to keep chickens at the university and approached Teresa to explore the possibility of collaborating with them. Joel and Teresa mentioned that until I approached them, they were unsure about whether they would manage to create a chicken project on campus. They anticipated difficulties with getting permissions to construct a chicken house on the heritage-protected land at the university due to the difficulties they had with finding a space for the growing projects.

Furthermore, they had strong concerns about the responsibility that comes with caring for living animals, which might outlive the existence of Growhampton.

Yet, from the beginning Growhampton's logo and all merchandise material related to the organisation featured exclusively a chicken (see Figure 50). Considering that chickens were not a major focus of Growhampton, I asked Teresa why they chose it to represent the organisation. She expressed that they had also considered using plants for Growhampton's branding as well and not just chickens but in the end they chose the outline of a cockerel (Teresa in interview):

She's [the graphic designer of the student union] seen it in urban farming logos and we thought the chicken looked really cool. It makes quite a statement [...] you think *urban farm*. But we did have a conversation about it, like what if we didn't get chickens or we won't get chickens for ages, and we actually decided that it didn't matter based on the fact that Apple has nothing to do with apples. It just has to be quite recognizable. We thought it was eye catching and kind of trendy and we thought if we don't get chickens it would be still that. I guess it was representation of farming. It is quite iconic.

Joel told me about his enthusiasm about the urban farming movement. In the quote above it becomes clear that Teresa felt inspired by the urban farming movement too and that she believed that a chicken symbolises "urban farm" which they both wanted Growhampton to be. At a later point Teresa told me that she thought that "chickens are more charismatic than plants" and that is why she felt they were more attractive as symbol for urban farming.

During an initial meeting with Teresa, we agreed that I would lead the development of the chicken project in close collaboration with them. Growhampton would provide all of the required resources and lead the project in the future. We set out to seek permissions from the University senior management and the Health and Safety division on campus. At this point in my research project I had only limited fieldwork experience and gathered most of my knowledge about chicken keeping from books, online blogs, and articles. I found it challenging to give definite answers to basic practical chicken keeping questions, which came up regularly, as I did not have first-hand experiences with keeping chickens (e.g. “is this space too sunny for the chickens?”). I told Teresa about my friend Simon, who is an expert chicken keeper and pedigree breeder and who offered to help us when needed. Simon helped us to choose a suitable location for the chickens and made us aware of the value of the young orchard on campus, which could provide the chickens with shade, insects and fallen fruit.

I researched several options for chicken houses, enclosures and other equipment. Growhampton had allocated a budget of £600 for the chicken project in its initial grant application, for which we could theoretically purchase a small chicken house and enclosure. However, we soon realised that these cheaper options would not allow the students to walk inside the enclosure and chicken house (the enclosures often being less than one metre tall), which would make the interactions with the chickens significantly less appealing. Also, when Teresa asked me how much space six chickens really needed to be happy, I could not give her a definite answer. According to product descriptions of chicken houses online, six chickens needed around five square metre enclosure. On the other hand, Simon, my friend who I visited a few times kept his pedigree Bantams in small

wooden cages. Again, I did not feel confident to give a definite answer due to my lack of experience in chicken keeping (at this point).

Another important requirement, which I did not anticipate, was the physical appearance of the chicken house and enclosure. There were aesthetic expectations that we needed to meet when keeping chickens on University grounds. This translated to, among other things, the fact that a wooden picket fence to give it a “more traditional feel” (quote Teresa) was chosen instead of cheaper chicken wire fence.

The University of Roehampton is located only minutes away from Richmond Park and foxes and badgers live on the University grounds, which made a strong enclosure necessary (as advised by Simon, our chicken expert, who told me later that he thought the chickens would not survive their first year, due to the high number of predators). Finally Teresa secured additional funding for a wooden chicken house, a fox-proof, wooden, walk-in enclosure, and a wooden picket fenced area – enough space for 12 hens according to the product descriptions online.

Before we began the process of locating a physical space for the chicken house, getting the equipment and the chicken breeds, Teresa organized a visit to another university with chickens as she hoped we could learn from their experiences. We were interested in their choices of breeds and equipment and the way they managed the care of the chickens. Lancaster University’s Student Union also received a Students’ Green Fund award and used the grant to create a growing project and to get chickens on the university grounds. They chose to keep ex-commercial hens, which are usually around 70 weeks of age and past their most productive time as egg layers at the point of arrival. Volunteers are

responsible for refilling the water and food containers and for collecting the eggs that they are allowed to keep. The cleaning of the chicken area is, however, not the responsibility of the volunteers, but these tasks are outsourced to the company who supplied the project with poultry equipment. Following our visit at Lancaster, Teresa and I discussed possible options for purchasing equipment and for the management of the project and volunteers. Unlike Lancaster University, Teresa and Joel envisioned student volunteers to be involved in all aspects of chicken keeping including regular cleaning tasks. Involving students in all tasks should help them to get a realistic idea of what keeping chickens and dealing with livestock more generally entails. At this point Teresa also first expressed the idea that she did not envision the chickens to become campus pets but to be perceived as livestock.

We discussed suitable breeds and desirable attributes in breeds early on in the project and getting ex-commercial hens especially appealed to Teresa, due to their potential educational value. Teresa felt that showing students the state commercial hens were in when they arrived on campus would be a valuable food education lesson, as they would get to see some of the negative consequences of large-scale commercial food production. Furthermore, we were both keen to give some ex-commercial hens a life beyond the commercial farm. In the end however, we both felt that we were not experienced chicken keepers and we preferred healthy and strong chickens rather than to risk having to deal with health issues as the project at Lancaster University had encountered: “I don’t think it would be good for them to find dead chickens all the time” (Teresa in a conversation). I personally believe that we could have dealt with the challenges related to keeping ex-commercial hens, but we preferred to keep traditional breed chickens as they were less likely to develop health issues. This is partly due to the fact that I perceived keeping

chickens in public, as it was the case at the university, as intimidating and it did not allow for mistakes, which I believed were significantly more likely to occur with ex-commercial hens.

We considered getting hybrid breeds, such as chosen by a primary school, which we also visited in preparation for the project. Hybrid breeds are extremely productive egg layers and usually docile and easily tameable chickens. We finally selected 'rare' breed hens for two reasons: Firstly, it is commonly believed that hybrid chickens lay most of their eggs in the first and second year of their lives, but that the number of eggs decreases substantially after the second year. Rare breeds, which are less productive in their first year, will however continue to lay regularly even after the second year of their lives. Therefore, we agreed that the more sustainable option was to purchase rare breed hens. We believed that the diversity in appearance of chicken breeds could potentially have an engaging effect and attract student, staff and the local community volunteers for the project. Hybrid chicken breeds are often either of light brown or white colours, and of rather monotonous patterns, and Teresa felt that they therefore would only have a limited "novelty factor" (quote Teresa) as people were more likely to visually know these breeds.

Growhampton would be later criticised for choosing colourful chicken breeds. A staff member at the University approached them and, according to Teresa, inquired why "unproductive designer chickens instead of normal chickens" were chosen. "I would have thought that with a sustainability project like yours, you would have considered animal welfare issues. Those hens must have been really expensive". We chose breeds that would lay fewer eggs compared with productive hybrid chickens in the short-run, because we thought this to be the more sustainable choice. The person who approached

Growhampton believed exactly the opposite: they felt that these breeds were designer chickens, bred to be pretty and not productive and the commercial hens, ex-battery hens were the 'normal', non-designer breeds.

We sourced the chickens from a poultry auction, rather than from a poultry breeder or market, since we wanted to get several different breeds and poultry breeders often offer only a limited diversity of breeds. Additionally, March, the month we finished preparing the site for the chickens, was quite early into the breeding year, which meant that most available birds were either birds from the previous breeding season, or chickens that were quite young and hard to sex (to tell if they were female or male chicks). The breeds we were searching for were not available with many breeders and there were waiting lists for some breeds that seemed to be in trend: Araucana hens were highly desirable at this point, as a breeder pointed out when I talked to him on the phone. The breeder stated that every year other breed trends emerge, but that it was hard for him to plan ahead, as people want hens at least 18 weeks of age. By the time he became aware of the increased demand he needed 20 more weeks to hatch and raise those hens.

In April Joel, Teresa, Simon and I attended the Salisbury poultry auction (see Figure 51). Simon advised me days before the auction to prepare by going through the list of chickens advertised in the auction catalogue. Following his suggestion, I downloaded the poultry auction's catalogue of the day, containing lots one could bid for. Lots were classified either as livestock or deadstock in separate sections. While the deadstock section contained objects and materials related to poultry keeping (such as drinkers, bedding and other equipment), live chickens were offered in the category livestock. A lot represented, in case

of poultry, a cage with between one and three chickens. In the catalogue a lot was listed such as in the following examples:

623 WELSUMMER PULLET

638 2 SILVER LACED WYANDOTTE HENS POL

675 TRIO BLACK FRENCH COPPER MARAN POL



Figure 51 The Poultry Auction Hall

Each lot title usually contained some coded information about the chickens. For example, 'pullet', as in the first lot in the example above, indicates that the hen did not pass her first moult yet and the acronym, POL stands for point-of-lay. Point-of-lay hens are about to start laying or only started laying recently. Chicken-keeping nomenclature is vital when choosing hens, as it gives crucial additional information about the age of hens and the sex of the chickens within the lot, e.g. Trio stands for two hens and one cockerel.

The auction hall contained several rows of cages creating a corridor for people to walk along. Bidders could examine the lots, which was in our case cages with live birds, in the

hours preceding the auction. Simon's expertise was extremely important at this stage, as he made us aware of subtle signs that indicated how healthy the chickens were: we chose hens that were active and awake, had bright red wattles and combs, silky and shiny feathers, and had healthy looking feet. After this pre-selection of lots by Simon, we had a short list of lots containing healthy looking birds of breeds we were interested in. The auctioneer gradually travelled along the rows of pens on raised walkways pointing at each lot and announcing the increasing bids through a microphone. We finally bought eight hens (across five lots). When Simon performed a health check in the parking lot in front of the auction hall, he discovered that they had lice and scaly legs (mites between their scales). He rubbed diatomaceous earth between the feathers as a lice treatment. Teresa and I tried to help Simon with this, but we both were not able to comfortably hold the hens, which were flapping furiously when we tried.

5.3 Chickens on campus

After our return from the auction hall, and prior to releasing the hens in the enclosure we prepared at the university, we had to treat their scaly legs, a disease caused by mites between the scales of their feet. Simon instructed us to treat their legs with petrol and Vaseline to kill the mites. This meant that we took each hen and dipped its legs in a paper coffee cup filled with petrol before rubbing in rose tinted lip balm Vaseline, which I had by chance in my handbag. After releasing all the hens, now with pink legs, in their new enclosure we observed the emerging social structure in the flock ("I think the grey one is the boss hen"). We used Twitter to provide updates about the chickens for students and staff when we were at the auction house and continued to tweet about the hens once we arrived on campus. When I left the hens that afternoon, it was still light outside and they

did not seem to take notice of the chicken house, but spent their time walking around in the enclosure. I called Simon because a storm was coming and I was worried that the hens would not find their way into the chicken house. Simon reassured me that they would survive even without shelter (see Figure 52 with Growhampton chickens and enclosure in the background).

During the brief health check after the auction, Simon noticed that the crop (a pouch below a chicken's throat, part of the digestive tract) of one of the hens was significantly enlarged and blocked. We were instructed to keep checking the bird's crop on a daily basis and also advised us to massage the crop to make the food pass into the stomach. When he visited a few days later, he brought some olive oil and a pipette with him and we dripped some olive oil down the chicken's throat to make it easier for food to pass. At this point, Teresa and I spent a long time chasing after the chickens, as we did not know what the most effective way to catch and hold a chicken was and we did not want to scare or hurt them when catching them or while holding them. With Simon's support we slowly learned how to catch a chicken: "when you try to catch a chicken, open your arms wide and then it won't know where to go. Pretend to be a bird of prey".

Fred, who worked at the university and who advised us about chicken keeping on several occasions, kept telling us that we "will lose a few, that's how it is. But don't worry, they are only chickens" and that we should stop picking up and touching the chickens too much, but to just let them be. Fred, in the past a chicken keeper himself, felt that we

should not encourage students and visitors to pick up and stroke chickens, because they were not pets who enjoy being stroked.

People who passed by the chickens in the first few days, seemed to comment especially on the size of the hens: “they are huge!” and “isn’t the enclosure too small for them?” Teresa later criticised these comments: “even though we bought them the Hilton, I was surprised about the reactions...us being cruel when they didn’t have the run yet.” When I overheard a person making a comment about the size of the enclosure while being with Teresa, Teresa responded by explaining that commercial free-range hens had only a



Figure 52 Growhampton chickens with enclosure in the background

proportion of the space available and that the space that this enclosure provided was

more than sufficient. We chose one of the largest enclosures available on the FlyteSoFancy website that is a popular poultry equipment company (see also chapter 4 The 'Architecture of chicken keeping' on the subjectivity of how much space chickens require).

After we established a care and letting-out/locking-in routine for the chickens, I began recruiting volunteers to assist with the daily care routine. I initially asked some of the harvest volunteers who had become my friends for their help with the chickens, but they showed little interest in becoming regular chicken volunteers and the growing project and chicken project remained widely separated over the next year. This is because volunteering at the chicken project often meant that students worked alone, while the growing projects volunteers socialised with each other while gardening and harvesting. Therefore, I was primarily, if not exclusively, searching for volunteers who were interested in the animals, rather than in socialising with each other.

Through posters and flyers we caught the attention of several staff and students who I met and trained in taking care of the chickens. The chicken routine consisted of the volunteers changing the water of the metal drinker, filling up the chicken feeder, and cleaning the chicken house with a brush and a pan. Volunteers were also in charge of collecting the eggs in egg boxes dating them with a pencil and placing them into the fridge in the nearby kitchen in the Digby College chapel. An essential part of the routine was to let the chickens out into the picket fenced area in the morning, and to lock the chickens up in the secure enclosure by 4pm. Volunteers recorded their name, day and time and making note of the number and colour of eggs they collected in a register every time they took care of their chickens. The register also served as a check list of all the tasks they had

to perform. They used mixed corn to attract the chickens and to let the hens eat out of their hands.

It was the harvest volunteers who wanted to name the chickens when they first arrived. Teresa and Joel decided however not to encourage the naming because they did not want people to perceive them as pets. For Growhampton, the chickens were an element of their food education programme and they wanted students to perceive the chickens as a source of food - as livestock. The eggs they produced were sold on the market and Growhampton also considered using the meat of the chickens they reared. Therefore, according to Teresa, naming them would give students the wrong idea.

The chicken volunteers frequently gave the chickens names that they used in private when they took care of them. They often used identifying characteristics: the hen on the top of the pecking order would be called Bossy, and another hen which had messy feathers on her head would be called Scruffy and Funky. The harvest volunteers named two of the hens after other volunteers who left the University of Roehampton and therefore also the Growhampton project. Growhampton did not officially refer to their names on the Growhampton website in the chicken section, but the harvest volunteers used them frequently when referring to the chickens. Most chicken volunteers were also aware of these names, but also chose private names which they used when taking care of the hens.

5.4 From Egg to Dead

Weeks after getting the chickens, one hen remained in her nest for unusually long durations of time, barely spending time outside. University staff and students noticed its

absence and asked Growhampton staff about the missing hen. After consulting several trouble-shooting sections of online blogs for chicken keepers, I suspected that the hen was broody. I called Simon and asked him for advice. He demonstrated the characteristic sounds hens do when they are broody and confirmed that the hen was indeed broody. As previously mentioned in chapter 3 'Classifying chickens', broodiness is by many chicken keepers considered a problem: broody hens stop laying eggs and spend most of their days away from the rest of the flock. When hens are not able to sit on fertile eggs and hatch chicks, they can remain broody for several weeks and even months, which some chicken keepers believe to be unhealthy, draining for the hens: "the broody state is very taxing; a hen's energy reserves can be depleted by sitting on a nest for a long time" (Hinkinson 2013, location 1211). It is therefore common practice to discourage a hen from being broody, which is more often referred to as breaking the broodiness. There are several established methods for breaking the broodiness. Omlet (n.d.-e) on their website in the section chicken health/common chicken problems following approach for breaking broodiness in hens:

1. Dipping her underside in water - When a chicken is broody her temperature is increased. The idea behind this is to cool her down in order to break her broodiness. Simply dip the bottom of your broody hen in a bucket of cold water.
[..]
2. Placing ice cubes or frozen peas underneath her [...]
3. Creating a broody enclosure - If you have a wire cage, or dog crate place your broody hen in this with food and water. The wire cage is uncomfortable for her and will hopefully cool down her chest and vent area which will break her

broodiness. [...] This may seem cruel but in the long run it can be kinder than allowing her to sit on an empty nest whilst her health deteriorates.

In a discussion forum a chicken keeper unsuccessfully deals with broodiness: "I have an Orpington that has been broody all summer. I've tried breaking her a few times but to no avail. Now I just take her out of the nesting box a couple of times a day so she can eat, drink & dust (& poop)." We followed a similar approach in case of the Growhampton hen. As advised by Simon, for the first three weeks we pushed the hen regularly off her nest to encourage her to drink and eat and to break her broodiness. When she did not stop being broody, we finally decided to get fertile eggs for the hen to sit on and to let her raise chicks. Initially we were hesitant to let her sit on fertile eggs, because the timing was not convenient for us. It was the beginning of summer and we were both due to be away for several weeks for holidays, which meant that we could not take more time taking care of new chicks. Teresa felt that chicks would be a good attraction for the upcoming fresher's fair in September and so we decided to delay the hatching process until later in the summer.

I ordered 12 fertile eggs on Ebay because I knew that it was a common practice to trade eggs online, as a chicken keeper I visited used Ebay to sell eggs. We chose eggs from two different chicken breeds. We decided to choose a new breed as we enjoyed the idea of a colourful, mixed flock. We chose an auto-sexing breed. Auto-sexing breeds can be sexed only hours after hatching, which means that you can identify if they are male or female according to differences in their appearances. Being able to tell if a chick is male or female enables breeders to discard unwanted male chicks before they create any costs for the breeder. We chose an auto-sexing breed because I considered it might be easier to kill

male birds when they were only days old prior to developing a bond with them. Shannon has also mentioned to me that for her it was easier to cull small chicks than grown cockerels and I followed her advice. The second breed Teresa chose was a breed that laid blue-shelled eggs, for most people an unusual egg colour and therefore possibly an attraction when selling the eggs on the weekly Growhampton market at the Hive café.

Joel and I picked up a second-hand dog kennel as maternity ward [an expression used by chicken keepers online, in face-to-face conversation and also referred to in a *Your Chickens* article (Moore 2014b)]. I was advised by Simon to provide this maternity ward for the broody hen to separate her from the other hens who would disturb her while sitting on the eggs and who might later harm the chicks. On the day the eggs arrived, the hen stopped being broody. Having invested resources in the preparation for the chicks and in the eggs, we decided to explore other options. Again, we consulted Simon over the phone, who explained that we had two options: first, we could attempt to locate a broody hen, which we could borrow for a couple of months to sit on the eggs and then to raise the chicks until they could live independently. Second, we could use an incubator to hatch the eggs and then hope that one of the hens is ready (broody) to raise the chicks after they hatched.

After a few weeks of trying to find a broody hen online (City farms, friends, Facebook, Gumtree, preloved.co.uk) we gave up and Simon offered his incubator. Simon gave us six fertile Buff Orpington eggs with the incubator. Orpingtons are a dual-purpose breed, meaning that they are both good egg layers and meat birds. While we were hesitant to accept the gift and place the six Orpington eggs in the incubator additionally to the 12 fertile eggs we already bought, Simon told us to not worry about space issues: we could

eat the Opringtons we could not keep permanently. As a meat eater, slaughtering chickens for their meat seemed ethical to me. Teresa and Joel were both keen to rear animals for their meat, as they believed it could represent an important lesson for staff and students on campus.

We kept the incubator under Teresa's desk in the Growhampton office at the Roehampton Student Union. The Student Union staff and the harvest volunteers frequently peeked inside the incubator, checking the eggs and were generally excited because the incubator was a completely alien object in an office environment. One week after placing the eggs in the incubator, we candled them for the first time. Candling is a method for



Figure 53 Growhampton volunteers spending time with the chicks in the office

monitoring the development of embryos inside the eggs by placing a generic torch or candler (a light specifically manufactured for this purpose) on the egg to see through the shell and to identify any vessel development. When visiting Dora and through an involvement in a hatching project at a city farm, I learned how to candle eggs. We used a mobile phone instead of a candler, as frequently suggested by chicken keepers online, and found blood vessels developing in 8 eggs. 21 days after placing the eggs in the incubator the first chicks started to hatch. Teresa and her intern called me and we spent most of the day, with four more harvest volunteers in the Growhampton office, watching the chicks hatching (see Figure 53).

We hoped that one of the hens would be broody at this point and able to adopt the chicks, so we did not have to hand-rear them. Two of the hens showed signs of broodiness a few days before the chicks hatched but, according to Simon, who I kept up-to-date throughout this time and who gave advice on how to proceed, it was a bit early to introduce chicks to them as they might not be “settled enough” to accept the chicks as their own. Therefore, after the chicks hatched, we placed them under an electric hen which is a small heating unit imitating the warmth of a broody hen. After a few days, Teresa and I decided to attempt to place two chicks under the two hens at night. Simon explained over the phone how and when we should best try to introduce the chicks to the broody hens. We first determined their sex by comparing pictures from blogs online of the typical colour pattern of chicks of this breed with the chicks that hatched. Two of the chicks we believed to be male and we decided to test whether the hen was going to accept the chicks by placing the male chicks under their wings. As we were unsure whether the hens would accept or reject the chicks, we considered risking the life of a male chick, which we did not want to keep long-term, as the preferred option compared to risking the life of a female chick. The hens did not accept the chicks as their own and one of the chicks did not survive the night.

At this point, Teresa, two volunteers and I recognised that we had to hand-rear the chicks. For the next two weeks we kept and raised them in the student union building. Two harvest volunteers named the chicks on the day they hatched and became quickly attached to them. They were eager to keep them in their homes and kept them for weeks in their living room before we released them in the chicken enclosure to live with the flock. Simon sexed the two Buff Orpington chicks when they were 20 weeks old. We suspected that they are cockerels judging by their behaviour, but sent videos and

photographs of the birds to Simon who confirmed their sex. Before we decided to get fertile eggs, Teresa and I had agreed on how we would deal with cockerels. Keeping cockerels at the University was not an option, due to the proximity to student residences and the crowing sounds that would disturb students.

Teresa and Joel mentioned that keeping chickens could be an important food education lesson for students and staff to learn about the realities of raising livestock and the production of animal based foods. Part of this was for Teresa to not encourage the naming of chickens, so students would not perceive them only as pets. Teresa wanted the chicken volunteers to be involved in all aspects of their care, including the regular cleaning of the chicken coop as this was an important aspect of animal based food production. And finally both Teresa and Joel felt that it was important to make people aware that animals had to be slaughtered to produce meat. Due to this food education agenda, even though we could have tried to find homes for the cockerels, we decided to slaughter them. Growhampton was also involved in the rearing of a pig (in collaboration with an urban community farm) and they used its meat as food ingredient in their café. Slaughtering a campus-reared cockerel could trigger an important discussion about the ethics of eating meat and animal welfare.

Teresa and I were going to slaughter and butcher the cockerels. We prepared by watching tutorial videos on YouTube and I wrote to Simon to find out more about skinning and butchering chickens. At this point I had seen several chickens being killed, some of them during my stays at a smallholding with Shannon and Jamie who taught others about how to kill and prepare chickens for consumption. Simon also showed me how to kill a chicken by breaking its neck and instructed me while I killed one of his cockerels (according to

Simon, the cockerel needed to be culled as it was not suitable to be shown at a pedigree poultry show). We decided to use the broomstick method, a method I observed when I stayed with Shannon and Jamie and which was also mentioned and used in several instructional videos and blog entries.

Staff and students inquired about the cockerels with Growhampton and with me and were openly told about the possibility of them going to slaughter. Most people reacted in a positive manner and showed curiosity in how and when we were planning to do it. We often joked about the upcoming slaughter and smirked whenever the topic came up. There seemed to be a comical side to slaughtering a chicken. On the other hand, I was told that some of the Hive café and University staff did not agree with us slaughtering the cockerel and that some students were looking for a farm that would take our cockerels to keep them alive.

On the day of the slaughter, Teresa, Joel and I again watched several YouTube videos, and printed step-by-step instructions with pictures that we collected from multiple online sources. We decided to slaughter one of the cockerels that day and slaughter the second cockerel at a later point. We gathered several knives, multiple bin bags we used as aprons and for disposing waste, chopping boards and a broomstick. We picked up the cockerel from the chicken area in a cardboard box and brought it to a slightly concealed area on campus. Keeping the slaughter and butchering process secretive and out of sight from students and staff seemed to be important at this point, as we did not cause any harm or distress. We calmed the bird and then broke its neck with the broomstick method. Using this method, the chicken is laid down on the ground, the broomstick loosely laid across its neck, before applying pressure by standing on the broomstick and pulling the neck

simultaneously to break it securely. We then skinned and cut the chicken according to the printed instructions. One of the first cuts we decided to do, was to chop off the head and the feet, so we could forget the animal we knew and start viewing it as a piece of meat – as advised in one of the YouTube videos.

We later froze the meat and planned to eat the cockerel with others who were involved in the chicken project and who were interested in eating a campus-reared chicken. On the same day we had to inform the regular chicken volunteers about the missing cockerel. Joel, the Growhampton growing project coordinator added the following paragraph to the email we sent out to the volunteers:

We did have an opportunity to re-home the other cockerel however this has fallen through so he will now have to be culled too. This is unfortunately a necessary part of keeping livestock. As a food education project, we feel it is important to be true to this education work (as difficult as it may be) and as a true reflection of what happens in our society and on real farms. We really hope that you understand this and should you wish to be part of the cull and processing of the animal, you would be welcome to join for this.

Ten volunteers responded to this email, more than to any other email we sent to the chicken volunteers until that point. All emails were supportive, and some showed an interest in participating in the next slaughter. Among them a mother with her small 3-year-old daughter:

Thank you very much for your updates! We would like to be a part of the cull & processing, as we're 100% city people with very limited connection to our food sources.

As I have mentioned in the Introduction and as I will further discuss in chapter 8 'Living the good life – nostalgia for the rural idyll', producing food at home and the living-off-the-land movement experienced a revival in the early 2000s. The desire of the volunteer with the small child who wanted to take part in the slaughter and butchering of the cockerel can be considered part of the back-to-the-land movement and their desire to reconnect with the land, an idea which has both a material and spiritual dimension (Halfacree 2006). Besides the growing interest in allotment gardening (according to Harrison (2011) 86,000 people were on an allotment waiting list in the UK in 2011), producing honey with bee hives, cheese making, beer brewing, poultry and pig keeping, and food preservation (as offered by Borough Kitchen based at Borough market) and butchery classes (e.g. Ginger pig butcher based in London) are part of the same movement that is characterised by an increased interest and curiosity in producing and processing food themselves.

In this section I discuss the experiences, major events and learning processes that were part of the Growhampton chicken project. Before concluding this chapter I will review, and make sense of, the enskilment processes and our apprenticeship in chicken keeping at Growhampton in the next section.

5.5 Enskilment in the chicken house

The central theme of this chapter is the processes chicken keepers go through to become skilled in keeping chickens. The chicken keeping project at Growhampton allowed me to explore and experience first-hand some of these learning processes. How did Teresa, other volunteers regularly involved in the Growhampton chicken project, and I become skilled? How do I now know the answers to practical chicken keeping questions, which I had in the beginning of the Growhampton chicken project and which I did not know the answers to? We did not solely rely on reading 'How to keep chickens books' – book knowledge did not seem to be enough as I have described above. We relied heavily on the feedback and advice of other, more experienced, chicken keepers such as Simon.

Simon helped us with his expertise to choose the healthy-looking birds during the auction. For example, when Teresa and I pointed at a cage with pretty looking birds and asked him "what about those", he told us that they look awful and are obviously not well because they are too thin and possibly have worms. He demonstrated and taught us how to catch and pick up a hen and reassured us when we were worried about hurting their wings in the process of it. Simon reassured me when I was worried about the hens being too exposed to the storm and it was Simon who helped us with the crucial decisions during the from-egg-to-dead mission. The virtual site provided the second important expert source. Facebook groups and blogs with a focus on chicken keeping often included comments, pictures and videos of people who shared our issues and asked the same questions we were looking answers for. The experiences of others and the feedback they received by more experienced chicken keepers helped us to learn. Instructional videos on YouTube represented an especially important source of expertise. It is difficult to

understand how to catch, to apply lice treatment, or how to slaughter a chicken without seeing a person perform this action, which you can in turn imitate. YouTube video gave us the opportunity to observe more experienced chicken keepers perform the tasks we wanted to learn.

Besides the interpersonal feedback and advice we sought and received, I believe there was another crucial aspect of the enskilment process. We learned from observing the chickens and interpreting their behaviour. We learned *from the chickens*. For example, there were several questions that arose during the planning phase of the Growhampton chicken project, which I was unable to answer solely based on knowledge acquired by books at this point. Rather than being taught the subtleties about the hens' preferences through reading books or by asking Simon about it, we learned by observing the hens that they prefer sun in the afternoons, because they like to dust bath in dry patches of soil. I am now aware that they also need some shade, because chickens easily overheat, which they express by opening their beaks, similarly to dogs when they are too hot. Subsequently we tried to prevent this by trying several options to solve the issue. We provided them with water and when I poured several buckets of water in a pit, I could see them take pleasure in walking through the water and mud, looking and digging for worms and enjoying themselves. The engagement with the chickens and the interpretation of their behaviour taught me to great extent about chicken keeping. I know these things not because of Simon's expert advice, but because I learned about the animals by watching them and by solving problems after they occurred.

The regular challenges of the practical world forced us to experiment, try and learn in the process. At the same time, having Simon and other experts to reassure and help us was

important for the learning process. This was the case for example when he had to hand-rear the chicks, which lead me to call for Simon's help on several occasions. As Palsson (2015, 133) put it enskilment is "a form of apprenticeship that allows for protection, experimentation, and varying degrees of skill and responsibility." Here, the enskilment process is the interplay of learning from and becoming apprentice of more knowledgeable chicken keepers (including the virtual site), but we cannot underestimate the role of the animal in the enskilment process and the importance to learn to read and interpret their behaviour and actions and address them with actions of our own.

5.6 Concluding thoughts and chapter summary

This chapter was based on my involvement in the Growhampton chicken project. As described, Growhampton is a food-sustainability project, which has the aim to educate students about how and where their food is produced. Through the chickens, Teresa, the Growhampton manager, hoped to teach the students and the staff at the university about the connection between animals and animal protection. To achieve this it was important for students and staff to perceive the chickens not only as campus mascots and pets, but also as livestock, as producers of food. I engaged in a discussion about animal ethics related to the differing ways the chickens were classified. Several crucial situations and instances during the Growhampton chicken project provided interesting insights to how we related to the chickens.

University staff commented on the lack of space in the enclosure, prompting Teresa to compare the environment Growhampton provided the hens with to the space commercial hens live in. Growhampton was criticised for getting colourful and 'pretty' chicken breeds

instead of productive, 'traditional' breeds. Teresa decided to discourage the naming of the chickens to prevent the chickens to be perceived only as pets. The broody hen was discouraged and attempted to 'be broken', when it was inconvenient for us. Teresa, the Growhampton volunteers, and I were quick to risk the lives of male chicks and finally we slaughtered two of the cockerels which we had raised for several months. These diverse attitudes and perspectives towards how the chickens should be treated and kept were made visible due to the public nature of the project based in the centre of the campus.

The Growhampton chicken project enabled me to explore the enskilment processes related to chicken keeping. I have illustrated that chicken keepers need to become apprentices in chicken keeping. As apprentices, chicken keepers depend on expert advice and feedback, which they draw on in diverse ways. Personal encounters with experts are extremely valuable as my apprentice-expert relationship with Simon has shown. However, the virtual site also proved to provide valuable feedback and diverse sources for an apprenticeship in chicken keeping: through YouTube tutorial and discussions, questions and conversations in Facebook groups, chicken keepers learn to deal with everyday issues related to the practice of chicken keeping. Finally, I revealed that chicken keepers also learn from the chickens through regular observation and interpretation of their behaviour, which helps the keeper to become better in caring for these animals.

To read and interpret the chickens' behaviour chicken keepers rely on their senses. As I described above, Simon knew whether a chicken is healthy or ill by looking at it through a cage and by interpreting their behaviour and some physical features such as the colour of their wattles and the state of their feather coat. There are many other examples, when the senses of sight, touch, smell, taste and hearing play important roles in the practice of

chicken keeping, which lead to chicken keepers developing 'a feeling' for keeping chickens. Therefore, in the next chapter I will describe how chicken keepers experience the practice of chicken keeping and how they know and feel their chickens with all their senses.

6 Feeling (for) chickens

This chapter examines sensual ways keepers experience the engagements with their chickens and the importance of the human senses in the process of keeping chickens. It is based on literature from Atkins (1977), Douglas (1978), Berger (1980), Philo (1995), Stoller (1997), Marvin (2005) and Howes (2010). The empirical material is derived from observations of and interviews with Andy, Dora, Mark, Katie, Alice, Sue, Shannon and Jamie, Simon and my experiences at Growhampton and as volunteer at a London city farm. I chose to analyse my material in this chapter by adopting an approach that considers the experiences that chicken keepers make with all their senses in contact with the chickens. I will explore how chicken keepers experience this human-animal relationship with their senses of smell, taste, hearing, touch and their visual sense.

Researchers in anthropology, human geography, history and sociology have been researching interactions that people have had with their environment and nature for decades, but only recently increasingly focused on human sensuous perceptions of their environment (Macnaghten & Urry 1998; Urry 2002; Howes 2010;). In the 17th and 18th century rationalists believed that the sensuous body cannot be trusted as objective source of knowledge (Stoller 1997). Even more recently social scientists primarily relied on their visual sense. Merely the visual sense was deemed a source of objective data, while the “so-called lower senses [smell, taste, hearing and touch], have, by contrast been underrepresented and under-theorized in contemporary scholarship” (Howes 2005, XII). The recent consideration and acknowledgement of the value of these other senses in anthropology has been referred to as sensuous turn (Howes 2005).

Stoller (1997) argues that to consider all senses will only make ethnography more vivid and accessible and more faithful to reality as the research becomes less of a disembodied abstraction. As my own embodied experiences are especially important in this chapter, I share my sensuous experiences and my subjective perspective on several occasions. The consideration of senses and sensescapes (Porteous 2006) and with it the concepts of landscape, smellscape, soundscape, tastescape and the geography of touch became useful concepts that enable us to study how people perceive a specific environment. Howes (2005, 143) defines sensescape as “the idea that the experience of the environment and of the other person and things which inhabit the environment, is produced by a particular mode of distinguishing, valuing and combining the senses in the culture under study”. ‘Scape’ signifies here the place-relatedness and spatial order of the perceived sensuous experiences, which Porteous (2006) calls sensuous geography. In practice this means that sensescapes of types of places, such as the countryside or urban environments can have very different sensory-informed signatures, while when comparing similar places, such as comparing rural English areas with other rural English areas these signatures can have similar features. Agapito et al. (2014) explores the sensuous experiences of tourists in Southwest Portugal and identified several themes and perceptual maps according to types of places. Tourists shared similar terms describing their sensuous experiences in rural Southwest Portugal, such as the smell of fresh air, soil and local food, the taste of the sea, the sound of birds and the feeling of heat on their skin. Similarly, the urban environment has a specific sensory-informed signature, which is typically different to the rural experience. The question is what happens when a sensuous experience, which is typically part of one sensescape is placed in another? For example when placing livestock in the city? Before I answer this question, I will briefly review

literature on animal geography and the patterns of inclusion and exclusion of categories of animals in urban places.

6.1 Livestock in the city

Modern western societies have an “imaginative geography of animals” as Philo and Wilbert (2000, 11) phrased it, where particular kinds of animals are thought to belong to particular spaces and places, and certain animals are allowed in specific places, while others are excluded and unwelcome. These patterns of appropriate locations, of inclusion and exclusion changed, however, over time, making evident that societal forces produce these boundaries. The inclusion and exclusion of productive animals, or livestock, from human spaces, changed substantially in the last one hundred years, making visible that these boundaries cannot be taken for granted, but that they can shift.

The idea of finding animal husbandry in an English city in the present or the recent past might appear strange in view of the current pressure of urbanisation upon agricultural land use. The built-up area somehow seems an alien environment in which to keep horses, cows, pigs and sheep, but in mid-nineteenth century London the idea of a clear-cut distinction between urban and rural life had yet to develop (Atkins, 1977, 383).

Atkins (1977) and Philo (1995) discuss this changing perceived appropriateness of livestock in an urban environment and discuss the historic patterns of inclusion and exclusion of animals in the city with special focus given to the treatment of livestock in London. Atkins treats animals as a social group that has been marginalized and is deemed

inappropriate in the purely human sphere, the urban environment. Philo (1995) argues that historically, until the 19th century livestock was part of urban life. Live cows, sheep and pigs were a frequent sight at meat markets and on the way to slaughterhouses in cities and towns, but also on private property of the urban population who kept livestock on a small-scale.

In the nineteenth century no English city had severed itself from its rural connexion. The largest of them all still conducted extensive back-yard agriculture, not merely half-a-dozen hens in a coop of soap boxes, but cow-stalls, sheep-folds, pig-sties above and below ground in and out of dwellings, on and off the streets, wherever this rudimentary factory farming could be made to work. (Dyos & Wolff 1973, 898)

By the mid-nineteenth century the first by-laws regulating animals in cities, were introduced. They regulated infrastructure necessary for keeping large livestock, especially targeted towards regulating the presence of cows in London such as ventilation, lighting and drainage regulations (Atkins 1977). Besides these new regulations, public opinion shifted to consider animal husbandry in cities a problem and a risk. Philo's (1995) analysis of accounts of public debates and issues that were triggered by livestock in the cities, specifically focusing on Smithfield market, a livestock market. He bases his discussion on the accounts of urban dwellers such as shop owners, policemen, but also on the reports and minutes of the parliamentary select committee members who were assigned to investigate the state of Smithfield market. Two themes dominated these public opinions and committee reports: there was a conflict in how space is used by urban dwellers and by livestock, and livestock as a health and safety threat.

The first theme paints a picture of a general repulsion of how livestock transforms space into an environment of “disorderliness endemic to having livestock animals charging through urban streets” (Philo 1995, 669), with a shop owner mentioning that they needed additional staff to keep sheep from walking into shops and scaring away customers. In Smithfield, the disorderliness and general presence of livestock was compared with the behaviour of people living in this area and sharing the space with these animals. According to the account of one member of the parliamentary select committee for the state of Smithfield market, Smithfield was dominated by fighting and [...] disturbances that occur thereabout [...] that it exhibits the lowest state of morals to be found anywhere in the metropolis” (Committee in PP 1849 XIX, 372 cited after Philo 1995, 669). At a later point they refer to the “untamed sexuality of the animal being freely expressed in the public streets” (Committee and Norris in PP 1849 XIX, 372 cited after Philo 1995, 670) and to the human “improper sexual practices on the part of impressionable people living and working in Smithfield” (Committee and Norris in PP 1849 XIX page 372 cited after Philo 1995, 670). They imply the similarities in behaviour between the people and the animals sharing this space. Furthermore, there are accounts of problems caused by the movement of cattle blocking paths and causing a bridge to collapse (Philo 1995).

The second concern over livestock in urban environments was based on the fear of diseases caused by the presence of livestock and slaughterhouses that were sources of organic waste and foul odours. During this time the miasmatic theory was commonly accepted which held that bad smells were poisonous gases that could carry and cause diseases such as cholera or the Black Death (Last 2007). Therefore, bad odour caused by cattle and other livestock in urban environments was considered a health risk. This causal

connection between bad odours to disease is expressed according to Curtis (2013) in finding things disgusting. According to her parasite avoidance theory (PAT) disgust is an evolved adaptive system for the protection from possible sources of diseases. She suggests that the prevalence of pathogens and parasites in things that people across cultures find disgusting such as faeces, decomposing foods or other organic matter, and human bodily products lead to the evolution of a defence system based on avoidance, and this mechanism functions through human disgust.

Douglas (1978) views disgust of polluted or dirty matter not as product of human evolution, but as product of cultural forces. She believes that things that are considered dirt and our tendency to avoid, reject, and eliminate dirt can be understood as by-product of a systematic ordering of matter. She states that “if uncleanness is matter out of place, we must approach it through order. Uncleanness or dirt is that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained” (Douglas 1978, 40). Douglas suggested that dirt is the mirror of culture and that objects and events that do not fit into their cosmology have to be excluded as they represent a threat to their social order and are classified as dirt.

Sabloff (2001) uses Douglas’ concept of ‘matter out of place’ and discusses encounters of urban dwellers with the natural world and animals. Her critique is that anthropologists have explicitly and implicitly treated natural world and human spheres as two entirely separate zones, especially in urban contexts. Sabloff (2001) discusses instances when animals and their behaviour are treated as pollutants and methods for the elimination of the pollution (such as neutering and declawing).

Berger (1980) and Philo (1995) discuss the exclusion, or as Berger (1980, 21) phrased it the “disappearance”, of animals from modern urban spaces in the West. Berger (1980) contends that the disappearance of animals is the consequence of industrialisation, where the last remaining animals which one encounters are pets, animals kept in zoos, and animals considered pests and vermin. Marvin (2005) builds on Berger’s (1980) argument and adds that wildlife needs to be considered in this theory. He argues that even in cities wildlife, besides animals classified as pests and vermin, can be encountered when humans choose to pay attention to them.

In the following sections I will present my ethnographic material and discuss it in the context of the concepts introduced above. I will discuss the sensuous experiences of humans when they engage with chickens in four separate sections, starting with the senses of smell and taste and then moving to discuss the three other human senses.

6.2 Smelling and tasting chickens

Smells are an important part of the chicken keeping experience. The practice of chicken keeping is dominated by a variety of smells one would expect, such as chicken faeces, straw and bedding and the smell of feed and corn. It also has several unexpected smells such as petrol and vinegar, as I have mentioned in chapter 5 ‘Apprenticeship in chicken keeping’.

6.2.1 Chicken poo

Dealing with chicken faeces is a major part of the activities of chicken keepers. It is also often a part that is left out when chicken keeping is introduced as a form of home food

production and when framed as part of idealised rural life. The goal is “trying to live as much of the countryside as possible in the city” as a London based chicken keeper (Amy) phrased it. The question is whether people are really interested in all parts of a farm including the messy side such as livestock faeces, flies and mud. Smells related to chicken keeping could disturb neighbours (Mullin 2013), but it has not been discussed how smells related to chicken keeping affect chicken keepers themselves and how they become part of the chicken keeping experience.

Chicken houses and especially the perching area where the chickens spend their nights are prone to develop unpleasant smells. Wood shavings, straw and paper are materials that are used to keep the area dry and to reduce the smell of the faeces. There are bedding products available in online stores with added lemon scents to cover unpleasant smells offered specifically for chicken keepers. Most chicken keepers utilize these materials (the keepers I encountered usually without the added scent) and regularly change them to reduce unpleasant smells and moisture. Chicken keepers also add bedding material to the



Figure 54 Holly's chicken enclosure and allotment garden

nesting area of chickens but change it less frequently because chickens usually only use their nests to lay eggs and they do not defecate while they lay. There are diverse approaches towards cleaning the space of the chickens.



Figure 55 Holly's egg storage place

Holly, a London based chicken keeper, keeps chickens on her allotment and feels that it is necessary to clean the chicken house on a daily basis. Holly grew up in London, is currently a housewife and has two children who attend school and university. She is very passionate about gardening and chicken keeping and spends time at her allotment on a daily basis. The chicken enclosure and chicken house are located next to Holly's raised vegetable beds and to her wooden, spacious garden shed equipped with chairs, coffee table, kettle and cupboards filled with cups and plates with rural themed imagery including several cups with pictures of chickens on them. After she led me to her allotment, we first sat down at a table on the small patio of her garden shed, drank a cup of tea and ate a piece of home-baked cake she brought with her from her home. Holly clearly enjoys the aesthetics of rural life and her garden shed, coasters, apron, and

decorative items as figurines and wooden painted signs all depict rural romantic imaginaries (see Figures 54 and 55). Part of Holly's daily chicken routine is to take care of the chickens and clean the chicken house. Holly uses a sieve to separate the hemp bedding from the clumped-up chicken faeces (similar to cat owners dealing with faeces in cat litter boxes). She explained that she used to only clean the chicken house once every other day, but that she believes that it was a wasteful approach and by sieving the bedding, rather than exchanging it all, she can save a lot of money and still protect the immediate environment from bad odour, preventing possible issues with other allotment gardeners.

Holly completely replaces the bedding material once every week. The house of the Growhampton chickens is also mucked out, point cleaned (meaning picking out the large clusters of faeces) every day. Small-scale chicken keepers typically have a two-stage cleaning routine: they clean their chicken houses once or more frequently per week and give it a more thorough cleaning using a pressure cleaner or hose once every other month. The cleaning routine is also affected by the changing seasons: during wetter and muddier times cleaning the chicken house becomes a priority.

I started to notice the complete lack of chicken faeces in the chicken house and the tidiness of the general state of the chicken area in homes with small flocks of chickens. After mentioning my surprise to some chicken keepers I visited, including Holly and Amy, they disclosed that they had cleaned the chicken area prior to my arrival. As Alice, a chicken keeper I visited put it: "I would have been ashamed of the state it was in. It is often a bit smelly and dirty" and this is why she had to clean it in the morning of my arrival. Alice is a retired boarding school teacher and she first started keeping chickens when her sister-in-law who also keeps chickens told her about her experiences. Alice told me that

she considered getting a flock of chickens years before she finally got some, but then she bought a book on chicken keeping that made her reconsider. Alice felt that this book overcomplicated the activities and highlighted the difficulties related to chicken keeping, especially the health issues and that she felt not ready to deal with them. Her sister-in-law encouraged her to try it out and ensured her that there is nothing complicated or complex about chicken keeping. Alice finally obtained three bantam hens at her home based next to the boarding school and said that a major motivation for getting hens was to provide school children she taught and supervised with the opportunity to get in contact with chickens. Alice's house makes a tidy and clean impression and keeping the chickens clean is part of her routine. Similar to the state of her house, I found that the chicken house, an Eglu, was kept in an extremely clean and tidy state, lacking any trace of feathers, faeces, grass or soil.

I experienced a similar situation when I visited Jill. Jill is in her late thirties, a full-time researcher and whilst she has lived for some years in a city, she grew up in a rural environment. She recently bought a house together with her partner in a small village in Surrey and currently keeps two chickens. She started growing vegetables and keeping chickens before moving into the new house and has been keeping chickens for fourteen years. Jill led me through her garden during my first visit and when she showed me the chicken area I asked for permission to take a few pictures. She felt uncomfortable with me wanting to see the inside of the chicken house, and told me that it is too messy because there were some visible chicken faeces under the perches in the house. She accounted for the state of the chicken house and told me that she usually would clean it but that she did not find the time because she was away. Nevertheless, she agreed to let me take a photo before cleaning the chicken house, but then quickly cleaned the area and

encouraged me to take a photo of the cleaned area. Jill uses specific shoes to tend to the chickens in the chicken area, to prevent carrying any chicken faeces, mud, bedding or wood chips into the house. Both Alice and Jill were ashamed of the state of their chicken house before it was cleaned. They wanted to present a tidy and clean environment to me. They felt ashamed of the potential disorderly and messy state of the chicken house as this would have reflect their hygienic and orderliness standards of their home in general. The chicken house and area becomes an extension of their human home, blurring the threshold between the human and the animal spaces. I further discuss the transgression and blurring of spaces in chapter 7 'Edible pets – transgressing boundaries'.

In contrast to Jill and Alice, Shannon and Jamie, smallholders who I introduced in chapter 3 'Classifying chickens' and who live in rural England, experience the mud, bedding and faeces differently. This became apparent to me when I stayed with them and when I personally experienced subtle disgust on a few occasions. As a person who grew up in a town without regular contact with livestock, I sometimes experienced disgust in situations when the chicken keepers I visited did not. Shannon grew up in a rural area, where she also settled with her small family and not far from her mother who runs a small plant nursery business. Shannon and Jamie spend their days performing tasks both indoors and outdoors, often including tasks that require alternation between working indoors and outdoors. Her children also spend time playing and helping their parents and frequently move between the indoors and outdoors. Shoes are often not taken off between spending time indoors and outdoors, which means that straw, grass and soil and other chicken-related matter is brought into the indoor on the living room carpet. Touching the chickens and then immediately performing tasks in the kitchen, such as making toast and tea and preparing lunch occur frequently. Likewise, Simon, another chicken keeper I spent time

with who grew up with chickens and now breeds pedigree chickens for poultry shows, frequently touches, pets and culls birds and then performs tasks in the kitchen or eats without washing his hands between those activities.

The lack of washing the hands between touching the animals and the preparation of food, and soil and straw which was brought into the house, evoked disgust in me. Following Curtis' (2013) notion which I introduced above, this could be caused by an evolutionary mechanism that makes me feel disgusted by matter that could potentially cause diseases, such as faeces which could be transferred from the hens to the food that was prepared. As Shannon and Jamie and Simon did not feel that way, however, this feeling of disgust would rather be based on Douglas (1978), according to whom dirt and uncleanness is simply a by-product of the systematic ordering of matter. According to my urban experiences, chicken faeces, grass and soil are matter that should remain outdoors and therefore when I was exposed to an environment where this pattern was not followed, it evoked disgust in me. As Philo (1995) put it in his description of having livestock in Smithfield's market, it is the disorderliness of having livestock around and not necessarily the smell that puts off urban dwellers. As I will discuss in the following chapter, chickens are known to create a certain degree of disorderliness, with a chicken keeper referring to her chickens as "vandals" (Shooter 2011) as they frequently vandalise her garden and flowers.

I observed and documented differences in the tolerances towards accepting faeces, bedding, soil and odour in the chicken house, but also in the human indoors area. My experience with Jill and Alice revealed that it does not necessarily depend on the rurality of the environment on how chicken keepers feel about the cleanliness of the chicken area

and the appropriateness of livestock, odour and mess they come with. It is difficult to judge whether the tolerance for odour and farm related matters depends primarily on the (rural or urban) environment or previous experiences of the chicken keeper or on the flock size. Jill is a chicken keeper based in a rural environment where it is common to keep livestock. However, Jill did not grow up keeping chickens, and therefore might tolerate smells and mess connected to chicken keeping less compared to people who grew up with chickens at their homes. Chicken keepers with previous experiences with chickens or farms, such as Shannon, Mark, and Simon, who grew up with chickens, seem to have a higher threshold for what they would consider to be acceptable odour and gaps between cleaning the chicken house. Revisiting Douglas (1978) this could be simply based on their prior experiences of chickens belonging in the order, and therefore chickens and their bodily products being not out of place.

Another example of the rejection of bodily product was unexpected and surprising for me, but can be in part also explained by Douglas's (1978) theory on dirt and taboos. I encountered two chicken keepers who chose to not eat the eggs their hens laid, but who buy eggs for consumption from supermarkets instead. I met these chicken keepers, Alice's daughter, who I have also mentioned above and Catherine, who I have mentioned in chapter 4 'The Architecture of chicken keeping'. I will return to discuss these chicken keepers and their dislike of their chickens' eggs, in a section below, after discussing the enjoyment that keepers usually derive from eating their chickens' eggs.

Generally, the supply of fresh eggs from their own hens is an important motivation for people to start keeping chickens. The chicken keepers I talked to casually and during more formal interviews describe the taste of the eggs their hens lay as delicious, tasty, and

creamy with a strong orange colour of the yolk, standing in great contrast in taste and appearance to eggs one can purchase in supermarkets. The prospect of collecting freshly laid eggs which were still warm, from the chicken house and preparing them only minutes later, adds substantially to the gustatory experience. Jill, an experienced chicken keeper, told me that freshly laid eggs are especially useful when making poached eggs for breakfast (she explained this while preparing a poached egg for me), because the yolk and egg whites are still more compactly attached to each other. Eggs that are several weeks old, as Jamie, the smallholder I mentioned on several instances above, explained to me, are especially suitable for pickling because it is easier to peel them. When I helped him to prepare pickled eggs for the farmer's market where he sells his eggs, he showed me how to carefully peel the eggs without scratching or denting the slippery surface of the eggs which is easier when the egg shell is less connected to the boiled egg white, as it is the case with older eggs (see Figure 56).



Figure 56 Pickled eggs, which I prepared with Jamie

Alice's daughter and Catherine, as previously mentioned chose to not eat the eggs their hens lay but purchase the eggs they consume. Alice is a chicken keeper who keeps three bantam hens. While Alice enjoys the eggs her hens lay, her 25-year-old daughter does not usually consume them, but only eats eggs that she buys in supermarkets. According to Alice, her daughter feels disgusted by the idea of eating these eggs and she prefers the perceived sterility of supermarket eggs. I experienced a similar personal reaction when I started keeping chickens at the University. A few weeks after caring for the hens, I realized that I was not interested in consuming the eggs those hens had laid. In a similar way to Alice's daughter, I developed a sense of disgust for eating the eggs produced by our hens. I personally came to realise that in this instance I preferred to be ignorant about the messiness that comes with the production of animal products I consume. When I collected the eggs, I was faced with chicken faeces and smells in the chicken house and I could not disconnect these sensuous experiences with the food product.

Two volunteers at the university shared similar experiences but, in contrast to mine, these were not experiences in connection to the eggs, but to the meat of the cockerels we culled. They told me that they were disgusted by this home-raised meat. Alice's daughter, those two volunteers, and I prefer to detach ourselves from the origin of our food by buying eggs or meat from the farmers/supermarkets. Rationally, I am aware that because the university hens have access to fresh grass, a large area to roam free and are fed with organic feed, their eggs are of higher quality than chickens kept in commercial, organic, free-range settings. Yet I chose the sterility of supermarket eggs. As Holloway et al. (2007) put it "food seems simply to 'appear' in supermarkets rather than come out of the ground or have some other 'natural' origin. The appearance of this food is strictly regulated even for fresh fruit, vegetables and meat: signs of the organic origins of food (for example soil,

blood) are banished and blemishes are not tolerated” (Holloway et al. 2007, 178). That creates the illusion of sterility which I described above.

Catherine, who has been keeping chickens for a few years, explained me that her children, partner and neighbours enjoy eating the eggs of her chickens, but she cannot bring herself to eat them. Catherine is the chicken keeper who keeps framed pictures of her hens in the living room. She is strongly attached to the individual hens, which she also names. She feels that eating the eggs would be too intimate and explained that she “cannot eat the babies of my babies”. Catherine developed a disgust for her eggs, because she considers her chickens purely as pets: they are not livestock and therefore not producers of food. Eating something that has been created by her pets feels repulsive to her. Catherine’s choice for not eating her hens’ eggs and her disgust has a different root from the disgust which I described above. Yet both behaviours can be explained with Douglas (1978) ‘out of place’ theory. According to Irvine (2004, 28), the purpose of pets is to “please and entertain a human ‘master’” but, in contrast to livestock, pet animals are not producers of food. As pets are not considered producers of food, Catherine could not bring herself to eat the food her pets produced – her strong attitude of considering her chickens as pet animals, created repulsion for the “babies of her babies” (quoting Catherine). The chicken takes an ambiguous position when accepted as producer of food *and* pet blurring the threshold between livestock and pets and becoming with it a source of pollution as discussed by Douglas (1978). This pollution has to be eliminated and Catherine rejects the eggs and through this action makes the chicken safe again, living with it as pet.

6.2.2 Knowing faeces

Faeces are, however, not only a source of disgust, but represent an important source of information for knowledgeable chicken keepers about the health of their chickens. Stephanie, the Welsh chicken keeper who gives a chicken keeping course that I attended, believes it is important to view chicken faeces not only as nuisance but also as an indicator to assess the chicken's wellbeing. Stephanie brought props that would help us learn to judge whether different shapes and consistencies of chicken faeces are healthy or indicate that there is a health issue. She crafted several faeces models in different shapes out of clay and coloured them from green and brown to yellow and white. These models should help us to understand which colour and consistency of faeces we would encounter as chicken keepers, which ones we had to be concerned about and which faeces only look concerning to a novice chicken keeper but are normal, according to Stephanie (see Figure 57 for crafted models of chicken faeces).



Figure 57 Faeces models, made and used by Stephanie for her chicken keeping classes to teach the participants about abnormal/normal types of faeces

Jill is also aware of the importance of paying attention to the colour and consistency of chicken faeces. During my third visit to Jill's home, she told me that her 6-year old hen Tillie had "recently passed away". Jill told me that only shortly before the hen died she discovered "fluorescence green chicken poo which is pretty much chicken death". She realised that Tillie was going to die soon. Chicken faeces, as a health indicator is also a topic on several blogs and websites dedicated to the topic chicken keeping. Chicken keepers started to take and post pictures of suspicious chicken faeces asking for advice from the online communities. In response to the insecurity of novice chicken keepers, more experienced chicken keepers started creating "poo charts". The chicken and poultry section of the discussion and advice forum 'chat.allotment-garden.org' features a poo chart that has been created using photo submissions by users of this forums. It includes several poo categories such as normal, coral coloured, foamy, oily and watery and an especially smelly category referred to as broody poo. "When they do leave the nest, they produce the most horrible poops ever. Nothing smells quite so awful as a broody hen's poops. They are usually significantly larger poops than normal as well" (Hinkinson 2013, location 1191).

I have so far described negatively perceived smells and varying levels of disgust towards them. But there are other smells related to chicken keeping that are part of the experience of chicken keeping and prompt a positive response. I discuss these in the next section.

6.2.3 Corn, straw, and chicken breath

Some smells related to chicken keeping prompt a positive response in keepers, sometimes triggering childhood memories or nostalgic emotions. Luis told me that he connects the

smell of corn that he feeds to his chickens with his grandmother. She fed corn to her hens and while Luis knows that today other keepers feed layer pellets to their chickens, the smell and touch of corn are integral parts of his chicken keeping experience and contribute greatly to the pleasure he derives from this activity.

Stephanie, who teaches chicken keeping classes, told me in an email about a range of odours related to chicken keeping. Stephanie referred to “a distinctive sweet smell in their breath when they have a respiratory infection.” When Stephanie notices that a chicken is unwell, she picks it up and when keeping her nose close to the chicken’s beak, she can detect this sweet smell in case of a respiratory infection. Besides these odours with a practical application, there are also odours that Stephanie classifies in an email exchange as pleasant.

Some smells just evoke an immediate emotional response such as a bin of chicken feed or fresh bedding. I sometimes make my own coop cleaner from orange peel, vinegar and rosemary and the smell of that instantly makes me think of the chickens! The best example of this emotional response is probably from the smell of chicks hatching. It is such a specific smell - sort of damp and musty - and it reminds me of the first time I hatched chicks (about ten years ago) and the many hours I have spent watching the eggs and worrying about the chicks!

According to Drobnick (2006, 1), smells, and memory and emotion are closely related: “odors are unmatched in catalysing the evocation of distant memories and places”. Waskul et al. (2009) also describes smells as powerful vehicles for evoking the past. In their study, the research participants are prompted to describe their favourite and least

favourite odours and identify memories associated with these smells in their research journals. One participant vividly describes her favourite odour that is the smell of her skin after a hot day at a lake in the summer. She says that it “represents happy fun filled summers that seemed to go on for ever, holidays spent at my grandparent home [...] and fun with friends at the local lakes” (Waskul et al. 2009, 12). Waskul et al. refer to these idealised, nostalgic memories in connection with sensuous experiences as products of interpretive on-going sense-making rituals that Waskul et al. (2009, 11) call ‘idealizing activity’. These memories are versatile, not static, and are continuously used to interpret the present experiences.

Luis and Stephanie’s association of the odours such as corn, fresh bedding, and freshly-hatched chicks with memories of situations and people are all the products of what Waskul et al. (2009, 11) refer to as ‘sense-making idealizing activity’. Continuing with the activities of chicken keeping and with the associated smells evokes emotions and feelings in Luis and Stephanie, which are based on their (idealised) experiences of past times. These emotions are based on personal experiences are according to Waskul et al., important processes of the construction of the self-identity. This nostalgic reminiscing of the experienced past stands in contrast to the displaced nostalgia that I will elaborate on in chapter 8 ‘Living the good life – nostalgia for the rural idyll’ where I will discuss nostalgia for the rural idyll as a driving motivation for chicken keeping.

In the next section I will discuss the tactile engagements of chicken keeping and the diverse forms of touch.

6.3 Touching chickens

Tactile engagements with chickens are an important aspect of the interactions chicken keepers have with their chickens. Chicken keepers hold and touch chickens to determine whether they are healthy and productive. They pet and stroke them to calm and relax the chickens and themselves, and simply because they enjoy interacting with the chickens in a tactile way. I will start my section on the tactile engagements between chickens keepers and chickens with the process of catching and holding of chickens.

6.3.1 Catching and holding chickens

As discussed in chapter 3 ‘Classifying chickens’, small-scale chicken keepers with a hands-on approach tend to prefer chickens that are classified as docile and are easy to tame. A skill that all chicken keepers master after keeping chickens for some time is how to catch and hold a chicken. How easy it is to catch and hold a chicken depends on the experience of the chicken keeper but also on the breed (large fowl, bantam), character category (docile or flighty) and if the chicken has been handled by people occasionally, according to the farmyard manager at the city farm I volunteered at. During my weeks of volunteering at city farms, I was taught and could observe others being taught to pick up, carry and hold chickens and chicks. Before I started the PhD research I assumed that picking up a chicken would require only minimal experience, but even though I spent time with chickens during my childhood, I came to realise that novice chicken keepers (including myself) first have to develop a feeling for touching chickens. Initially, the chickens’ reactions to being caught and held can be confusing to the keeper, as I will describe in the next paragraphs.



Figure 58 Novice volunteer holding one of the Growhampton chickens

When I and other volunteers were taught how to hold a chicken by a farmyard supervisor at a chicken farm, we were instructed to pick up the chicken by holding the wings securely but not too tightly wrapped around the body to prevent any flapping and to make the bird feel safe. The farmyard volunteer supervisor told us to visualize an avocado when picking up a chicken with both hands: “You don’t want to hold it too tightly and bruise it, but not give too much space...so the wings escape and the bird feels unbalanced.” This is also the way that most novices will pick up a chicken such as in Figure 58. It is interesting and ironic that the way we were instructed to touch the chicken, was to think of it as an avocado, an exotic fruit widely popular with the British middle-class. Rather than knowing how to touch a chicken, we were presumed to know how to hold and touch a fruit that is mostly imported in the UK from Spain, Israel, South Africa and South America. We know how to touch an avocado but we don’t know how to touch a chicken.

During my encounters with chicken keepers of diverse backgrounds and different levels of expertise, I found that people with less experience felt concerned about hurting the chickens when touching, catching, picking up and holding them. Catching a chicken can sometimes be challenging, at times one has to corner it and as Simon, my chicken expert friend taught me: “pretend to be a hawk - keep your arms wide open, don’t give it a way out and then just grab it”.

In agreement with Simon’s advice, other experienced chicken keepers I observed catching



Figure 59 Mark holding a hen

a chicken often simply grab any body part or bunch of feathers they can get their hands on, preventing the chicken from continuing to escape. This provides the chicken keeper with sufficient time to pick up the chicken by supporting their body from underneath and securing the legs, or by wrapping their arms around their wings similarly as indicated above. Experienced chicken keepers often also hold their chickens by securing the legs and are then able to turn their chickens upside down, using the free hand to check for

parasites (lice or mites) by searching between the feathers and checking the skin for live insects running around. When upside down, chickens are usually extremely calm and easier to handle. It is also a technique which chicken keepers tend to use before they cull chickens.

Novice chicken keepers and people inexperienced in handling chickens are careful and less decisive when they catch and pick up chickens. While experienced chicken keepers would not feel concerned about catching a chicken by grabbing their tail or leg to stop them from running away, inexperienced chicken keepers will feel anxious about hurting the chicken and they would try to catch them by holding their whole body at once. Ella, a staff member at the University of Roehampton and regular volunteer with the Growhampton chicken project, explained to me that she felt it was challenging to catch the chickens because she did not know where she could touch them:

When you touch or pick up a child, you know exactly where to hold them, because you know their anatomy, because it is the same like yours. With mammals you know which body parts you can hold and which ones you shouldn't...like you shouldn't hold the tail of a cat. But with a chicken, they have wings and they don't use them like other birds and you really don't know where to touch them without hurting their delicate bones.



Figure 60 Chick held by an experienced chicken keeper



Figure 61 Chicks in a plastic container with electric hen and a plate with chick crumbs

A popular way for chicken keepers of all experience levels for holding a chicken is to carefully press one side of the chicken with the wing against their body (see Mark in Figure 59). This is a position that allows chicken keepers to interact with and pet their chickens while holding them. Mark additionally secures the legs of the chicken, which is a common practice among experienced chicken keepers.

Sue, a chicken keeper I talked to over the phone, told me that she finds it calming to hold and stroke her chickens and she enjoys touching the feathers of her hens which she describes as “silky and soft”. She told me that it soothes her and the experience of keeping chickens and especially stroking and petting them has been therapeutic. When she holds and slowly strokes her favourite hen, the hen seems to relax and makes soft clucking sounds, which she describes as the “most comforting feeling”.



Figure 62 Growhampton chicks held by volunteers

The tactile engagements with chicks are different compared to how people engage with grown chickens. People, not only chicken keepers, treat chicks with care and sensitivity, often wrapping their hands around them to provide them with comfort and warmth (see Figure 60) or holding them with cupped hands (see Figure 62). Chicks need warmth (such as provided by the electric hen, a heating device for rearing chicks, see Figure 61). The chicks in these images are chicks Roehampton students hand-reared and held and handled for many hours. Regular touch is an essential part of the taming process.

6.3.2 Touching balloons

Stephanie insisted that weekly health checks and ‘handling’ of the birds are important to keep track of the chickens’ wellbeing. Handling is also a term that was frequently used by farmyard workers at the urban city farms I volunteered at and which refers to the frequent

picking up and touching of animals to tame them. A health check usually includes a check of the vent area, making sure it is clean of dried faeces and free of lice, a check of the crop, of the feet for signs of diseases and making sure the weight of the chicken seems appropriate. This description of a health check was also shared by Simon and in several chicken keeping books and manuals (e.g. Dora's chicken keeping manual which she created for the chicken keeping course she teaches and by Graham (2015), a popular chicken keeping advice book with the title "chicken keeper's problem solver). These health checks vary between keepers: while Hannah and Mark are able to assess the optimal weight of their chickens by touching them (see next paragraph), less experienced chicken keepers I visited check thoroughly if their chickens have lice or mites.

Mark, as I have mentioned in chapter 3 'Classifying chickens', has a more hands-off approach and primarily relies on observing chickens without picking them up and touching them frequently. When a bird shows atypical behaviour, Mark touches the bird to check if they are unwell. Signs of alarming behaviour could be a decrease in the bird's activity or an unwillingness to leave the chicken house during the day. When he picks up the chicken, he touches the chicken's chest bone and feels how dominant the bone is compared to the muscle and fat layer surrounding the bone. He also feels for the crop, which is part of the oesophagus and a place where the first phase of digestion occurs, located below the chicken's neck.

Stephanie, who created the artificial chicken faeces models that I introduced in the previous section, also uses several handmade props to teach chicken keepers what they will feel when they examine the crop of a chicken. Stephanie worked for several months at an urban farm as farmyard volunteer and environmental education officer. After

collecting these experiences, she set up her own small enterprise providing environmental education classes for children and chicken keeping courses for beginning and advanced chicken keepers. To teach her course attendees to examine what the crop feels like, she brought several air balloons with her which she filled with different materials: one with water, another one with flour, and yet others with a mix of grains and little stones. A healthy crop, she explained, is supposed to be empty in the morning and full in the evening when the chickens go to sleep. When one picks up a chicken in the afternoon and touches and feels the crop, it is easy to feel each grain the chicken ate during the day. Impacted crops, as I experienced with the chickens at the university, are crops that are too dense and enlarged, and which can block the passage of the food to the stomach. I started carefully massaging the crop to dissolve the blocked, pasty area with the chicken in my arms, as instructed by a more experienced chicken keeper, on a daily basis. Sour crop is a yeast infection in the crop (The Chicken Vet n.d.) that makes it feel comparable to a balloon filled with water. The other course participants in Stephanie's chicken keeping class and I passed the balloons around and felt the differences in consistencies imagining it to be the crops of chickens.

Stephanie uses plastic balloons filled with water and flour to teach her students about chicken keeping. The farmyard manager at one of the city farms I volunteered at told us to imagine we are holding an avocado to teach us about how to hold a chicken. Both examples relate back to Halfacree's (2006) concept of how 'from the soil'-distant technological Western society attempts to reconnect with nature: speaking the language of our society we use plastics and exotic fruit to explain how to care for chickens.

6.4 Watching chickens

The visual perception of chickens is an important way for chicken keepers to become more knowledgeable and a source of enjoyment. In the next two sections, I will describe and discuss as to how chicken keepers experience the presence of chickens at their homes and specifically how it affects and transforms the landscape and soundscape there. Before I start to engage with my ethnographic material, I have to define “ways of seeing” (Berger 1972) animals, as not all looking is equal. Marvin (2005) describes different ways of looking at animals. He places different modes of seeing (seeing, looking, watching and observing) on a continuum of degree of attention towards the animal and interest in the subject’s behaviour.

‘Seeing’ is, according to Marvin (2005), the most basic form of visual engagement – the viewer notices the animal but does not further engage in this activity. ‘Looking’ is a more active and focused mode of regarding an animal with a higher degree of attention. ‘Watching’ is the active, interested and focused viewing of an animal. Marvin (2005) defines ‘observing’ similar to ‘watching’, but is characterised by a higher degree of purpose and focus on the behaviour of the animal. In the following sections I will return to these categories of viewing animals during my discussion of the ethnographic material.

6.4.1 Observing and watching

Katie, Alice and Sue discussed their change of perceptions of chickens and their realization that “they are not just silly chickens”, but they are perceived and considered as individuals and characters with differences in personalities. They got to know their chickens and discovered their personalities by watching them. They observe and watch them interact

with each other and their reactions to their presence. Through focused observation they understand the social structure in the flock and, in consequence, the position the individual chicken has in the pecking order. Several chicken keepers (such as Ruth, who I met during a visit at a community farm, Katie and Catherine) told me about the chickens' individual stories, pointing out the bullies, best friends, and chickens that they believed to be outsiders in the flock. They mentioned that they got to know their flock's relational history by observing and watching them on a regular, often daily, basis.¹¹

Catherine, a chicken keeper mentioned above, elaborated in detail about the relations between the chickens she keeps. She was especially concerned about Adrian, a Silkie bantam cockerel (a small bird compared to the rest of her flock), who was "heartbroken" after his companion, a Silkie hen, died suddenly. When Adrian became increasingly unwell, Catherine decided to take the cockerel to the local veterinarian. When she returned the cockerel to the flock only hours later, the flock started to bully Adrian and Catherine had to isolate him from the rest of the flock. In her living room on the wall Catherine showed me framed pictures of her chickens that had died and she referred to the blood and emotional relationships between the chickens on the pictures and their connections to their live descendants in the current flock.

Besides the clear anthropomorphic attributes that characterise the narrative above (see for example "heartbroken"), it also is an example of the result of hours of observations of

¹¹ I use the term watching for less purposeful, focused viewing of the behaviour of chickens, and observation for the viewing of the chickens to increase the understanding of the social structure, individuality, or to gain other insights.

the behaviour of chickens by Catherine. Catherine paid attention to the relationships between the chickens and recalled each chickens' biographies when she showed me photographs of them.

Bob obtained his flock of three hens after visiting a friend. When he stayed with his friend for a few days, he especially enjoyed watching his chickens. Once back home, he decided to get a few chickens as well: "watching the hens is very therapeutic. I love watching them from the kitchen window...It calms me. Sometimes they jump up to the window and look inside...they are really curious. I really like that." The calming and therapeutic effect of watching and living alongside chickens that have their own routines and lives independently from their humans has been a reoccurring theme when talking to chicken keepers. Dora, a chicken keeper and (intermittently) breeder has never been without chickens. She has been keeping chickens for over 30 years and even though to some extent she keeps them commercially (she sells fertile eggs on Ebay), she told me that they helped her through times she suffered of depression:

The chickens helped me through depression. I got them after my head injury a few years ago. Because of my health issues I had to cut down with breeding them and ...I had 100 hens before I stopped. Now I only have those five and I have much more time to watch and get to know them. They give me a reason to get up in the morning and I love to have them around me.

Keeping chickens as a form of animal therapy has been increasingly popular in recent years. The most successful project is probably Henpower that puts elderly people in care homes in charge of the care of chickens "to promote health and wellbeing and reduce

loneliness” (Equal arts n.d.). Furthermore several prisons in the UK started a chicken keeping initiative putting prisoners in charge of the care for chickens (BHWT 2011; BBC News 2014). Besides the therapeutic and calming effects that comes with living with animals, chicken keepers also often find watching their chickens entertaining: “watching chickens is my TV – chicken TV”, as one chicken keeper phrased it. Chickens stay seldom still, but usually move in rhythmic ways, pecking and scratching as they go, and having their own daily routines, which makes them very interesting to watch.



Figure 63 Chickens taking a dust bath and looking back at me

Katie, a chicken keeper in her mid-30s who lives with her parents and spends most of her day caring for her pet animals, including her chickens, found that her chickens are so entertaining to watch because they are “inquisitive”, “curious” and move “full of purpose” through her garden. Especially the social structure, the pecking order in a flock keeps things interesting according to Katie. As one of the volunteers at Growhampton put it:

“there is always some drama happening” (see Figure 63 from the perspective of a chicken keeper observing their flock, with the chickens looking back at them).

The close observation and focused visual evaluation of chickens is also a tool for experienced chicken keepers to assess a chicken’s wellbeing and health. Above, in the section on ‘touching chickens’, I have mentioned that Mark primarily relies on the observation of his chickens, rather than on regular health check by touch as other chicken keepers do. Mark only engages with chickens in a tactile way when he notices unusual behaviour or features in his chickens. Similarly, Simon was able to help Teresa and me to choose healthy birds solely relying on observing them in their cages. While these examples can be considered mostly watching and observing chickens, as described above and defined by Marvin (2005), the following examples are the viewing of chickens on a more passive level, which I believe are equally important.

6.4.2 Seeing and looking at chickens

Andy, a chicken keeper and writer, described how his chickens change the landscape of his garden and what they add to it. Andy explained to me how empty the garden felt when he had to keep the chickens locked away because his new dog kept attacking the free roaming chickens:

the chickens are still penned away and my garden seems dead without them...so I shall be letting them out again sometime later this week...but they do, they deliver a movement and sometimes when you have the wind blowing across and you have got the grass moving and you have the birds all lean with the grass, so you got this

kind of over all ocean effect, but equally when it's still, they... well, they appear to go against the grain if you like. So, they sometimes merge in and kind of go with the flow with the movement of the garden, but alternatively they can actually fight against it. And they can clash sometimes, you have sometimes really bright colours, and so sometimes you have these other chickens and the colour clash. And sometimes if you are using the Gold Spangled Owlbeard that I've got, at this time of the year when you've got the browns and the golds of the trees as they are, they camouflage and they are great. And suddenly you see these eyeballs and this chicken wanders out and you wonder where did that come from... I haven't spotted the fellow there, you know. And it is absolutely tremendous. And particularly with the seeds and the berries at this time of the year, you see them, they are jumping up, kind of getting them from up the trees.

Andy's quote does not imply active purposeful watching of his chickens but rather a looking in the direction of the chickens when he encounters them. The observation of behaviour and social structure are not the focus of his description but rather the acknowledgement of the presence of movements the chickens add and the coincidental noticing of the chickens when he did not expect to see them. Besides the movement and life chickens add to his garden, Andy also places emphasis on how the colours of his chickens sometimes complement and other times contrast the colour palette of the rest of his garden and how this changes the landscape of his home. Without his chickens, his garden feels dead, he says.

Another chicken keeper I visited, Alice, who is a keen gardener and has been keeping chickens for more than a decade, also told me that her chickens are important for how she experiences her garden.

It's nice to do the garden while they are there – it's lovely. But sometimes I have to be careful when I am digging. They come and help with the dig. It adds a dimension to the garden. [Without them] It's like having a fish tank with no fish in it.

While Alice told me that she frequently watches her chickens, in the statement above she refers to a passive appreciation of their presence. She does not actively observe her chickens while gardening but she is aware of their presence and at times looks at them - possibly leading to her to watch them and, but not inevitably.

6.5 Hearing and listening to chickens

In the previous section I made a distinction between different ways of viewing chickens (seeing, looking, watching and observing). In this section I refer to two different ways of perceiving the sounds chickens make: hearing is the passive perception of chicken sounds and listening is the active and focused perception of chicken-related sounds.

I mentioned previously that chicken keepers find it entertaining to observe chickens and try to understand their social structure. They get to know their daily routines, needs and behaviour. They start to think *with* chickens, trying to understand the needs and desires of a chicken rather than thinking *like* a chicken. Part of this acquired understanding of the

chickens' behaviour is also that chicken keepers can distinguish different sounds their chickens make and attribution of meaning to these sounds. Mark tells me that there is a different chicken sound a hen makes when they have just laid an egg and another sound for a hen that is just about to lay an egg. Furthermore, he tells me that there are different warning sounds for predators coming from the ground and from the air (which he imitates while telling me about these sounds). A hen that is upset makes a loud repetitive sound and a broody hen makes a scrawling, soothing clucking sound. Mark and others tell me that they can understand their chickens to some degree. Andy, Jill, Stephanie, Alice, and Holly mentioned that they understand the emotions their chickens want to express when they hear the sounds that they make. They can differentiate among others the soft purring broody hen sound, the loud clucking sound a hen makes when she just laid an egg, and the sound of a mother hen communicating with her chicks.

Simon and Mark, both chicken keepers who have been surrounded by chickens since their childhood, told me that they especially enjoy the soundscape chickens create. Simon stated that he can only truly feel at home when he hears chickens in his backyard. The clucking and scrawling sounds evoke a positive feeling in him and comfort him. Another chicken keeper, Jen, said that she stopped keeping chickens for half a year and that she missed her hens during this time, especially the chicken sounds.

I stopped because it was kind of a hassle. I lost Alice and Gertrude and 8 months goes by and then I thought aw I really miss chickens. [...] You kind of get used to them and they chat away. [...] and you talk to them. There is nothing like chicken noise. I love talking to them and making chicken noise.

As Jen pointed out and as noted by Katie, chicken keepers do not only listen to and hear their chickens, but also talk back to them. This was also shown when I talked to Simon and Mark, who imitated their sounds when I asked them whether they could understand their chickens. The 'talking back' is not necessarily expressed in a spontaneous production of chickens sounds on the side of the chicken keeper (the spontaneous initiation of a communication with the chickens), but as I have observed, rather through imitation and repeating of sounds that the chickens make during an encounter.

Not all sounds made by chickens are appreciated in their immediate neighbourhoods. One reason for only keeping hens is not only the inability of cockerels to lay eggs, but primarily the often negatively perceived crowing of cockerels. This sound became an issue for several chicken keepers I visited. One of them Katie, who nurses small animals (such as guinea pigs and rabbits) back to health, experienced problems with keeping a cockerel she hand-reared. Her neighbours complained about the daily crowing and Katie, who believed that it would be hard to find a new "good home" for her hybrid cockerel considered putting him through a "decrowing" procedure to "take his voice out". This procedure does not seem to be a common practice in the UK but references to it can be found more commonly on chicken keeping blogs and discussion forums. This procedure is typically considered to be cruel and unnecessary, but there is an argument being made by Katie and other chicken keepers that it is better for cockerels to be decrowed and keep their life living in a backyard of a small-scale chicken keeper, rather than having to be put down or slaughtered. Anna a chicken keeper in an urban environment, who hatches chicks in an incubator and hand-rears them in her garden every year, deals with her cockerels in a different way. Anna brings her cockerels to the veterinarian who euthanises them for her. She pays for her cockerels to be euthanised (or "put down" as Anna and others refer to it)

rather than trying to sell them online because she believes that she cannot be sure that these cockerels do not end up with people who use them in cockfights.

Another chicken keeper I worked with, Simon, who keeps and breeds pedigree chickens to show them on poultry shows had to adapt his daily chicken routine to avoid problems with neighbours in the urban environment he lives. Every evening, Simon brings his adult cockerels into his house and puts them in boxes with air holes under his staircase. The cockerels find themselves in complete darkness until Simon brings them into the garden again in the morning. This routine avoids any crowing in the early morning hours that could potentially disturb Simon's neighbours. While neighbours often seem to dislike being woken by crowing cockerels, the chicken keepers with cockerels I visited do not seem to find the noise caused by their chickens (hens can also be noisy) aggravating. Bob mentioned that he enjoys being woken by the crowing of his cockerels because it makes him feel like he wakes up in the countryside.

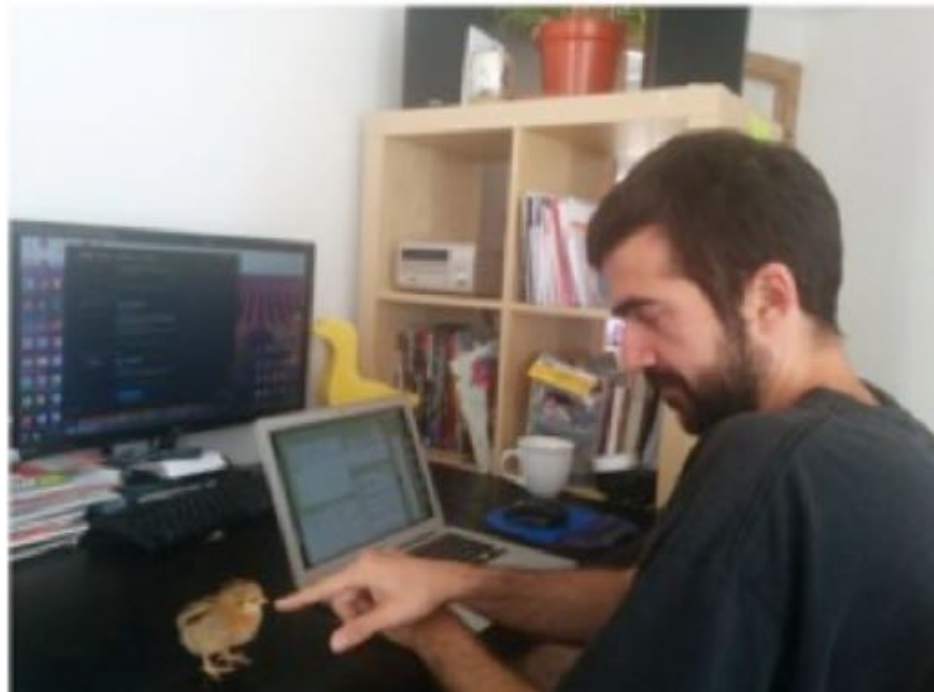


Figure 64 Chicks at my London flat

When I kept chicks at my London one-bedroom flat for a few days (through the Growhampton chicken project, see Chapter 5 'Apprenticeship in chicken keeping'), I learned to truly appreciate how much the soundscape can change with chickens and how alien chickens can appear in urban settings (see Figure 64 with chicks on our desk). Bringing the chicks home for a weekend was not my first choice, but after having one of the Growhampton hens reject the chicks, I was left with few other options. The smell of chick crumbs and faeces and the loudly chirping and shrieking chicks did not seem to be appropriate. In an attempt to calm the distressed chicks, my partner and I decided to bring some more nature to our flat: we imitated sunset in our living room by slowly dimming our reading lamp and hoped to aid the chicks to fall asleep under the electric hen. It worked!

6.6 Feeling chickens

In this chapter I have described the role human senses play in the practice of keeping chickens. Knowledgeable chicken keeper will use their senses to assess their chickens health such as feeling for the chest bone to identify if a hen is too thin and ill; touching the crop and determining if the consistency of the content is as it should be at the right time of the day; examining the faeces of hens, their consistency and colour can give information about the health of hens; smelling a chickens breath for sour smell to identify or rule out sour crop conditions; examining the feet and searching between the wings for lice and mites; noticing a hen's usually lethargic behaviour; identifying a hen's broody sounds – these are all examples that require the skilled senses of chicken keepers. Grasseni (2005) discusses in her ethnographic study of the cattle breeding culture in the Italian Alps, the importance of the expert eye that she refers to as 'skilled vision'. The

skilled vision of cow breeders is the product of experience and regular observation of the cows, which guide them to choose the ideal type of cow for breeding. Simon and Mark have equally skilled vision in assessing the health and wellbeing of chickens. But rather than only considering vision, I would argue chicken keepers develop ‘a feeling’ for their birds, which is also based on the other senses. As I have shown above, skilled touch, ears, and nose are extremely important sources of information for the expert chicken keeper and part of the experience of chicken keeping.

6.7 Concluding thoughts and chapter summary

This chapter explored diverse ways keepers know, feel, and experience their chickens. I used literature on sensuous ethnography and considered the importance of in anthropology and social sciences often neglected senses (smell, taste, hearing and touch) in addition to the visual sense in the engagements between chickens and humans. Another important stream of literature in this chapter, specifically in the section on smell and taste, were concepts from the field of animal geography, most importantly for my argument on the historic patterns of inclusion and exclusion of livestock from urban environments included in the work by Philo (1995). Philo described how livestock lived with humans in urban spaces until the mid-nineteenth century. With new ideas of orderliness in the city, space conflicts, and fear of illnesses, livestock was increasingly perceived as inappropriate and urban spaces are now considered purely human spheres.

Following Philo’s notion and Douglas (1978) theory on ‘matter out of place’ I also discussed instances when chickens were accepted and included in human spaces, such as

in the case of Simon and Shannon and Jamie where chicken-related matter is brought into the house and not considered as dirt.

Another different perspective towards the inclusion of chickens in the human sphere was provided by Catherine who considers her chickens to be pets and chooses to not consume the eggs of her chickens, due to her anthropomorphic attitudes towards chickens. Odours and faeces from chickens cause some chicken keepers to adopt strict frequent cleaning routines. Before my visits, several chicken keepers (Holly, Alice and Catherine) cleaned the chicken house as they said they would feel “ashamed” by the mess related to chicken keeping (Alice). When chicken keepers cleaned the chicken coop before my visits, they attempted to create an imagery of chicken keeping, which does not match the actual daily experience of chicken keeping. They attempted to conceal the messy aspects of chicken keeping in order to make chickens more appropriate in spaces which are traditionally occupied by humans. The decrowing and euthanasia of cockerels as described above, but also the minimising of odours and concealing of the messy aspects of chicken keeping, are methods for dealing with the perceived pollution caused by chickens. These examples are ‘muting mechanisms’ as defined by Sabloff (2001, 76), who states that “the ‘bothersome’ vestiges of animal being are, precisely, ‘inappropriate elements’ that must be rejected for the pattern of animal as human kin to be sustained and reproduced”. Through the muting of these ‘vestiges of animal being’, as the crowing of cockerels, chickens are incorporated in the human sphere.

The tactile engagements with chickens were discussed in this chapter. For some chicken keepers, weekly health checks and regular stroking and picking up of chickens are important practices related to chicken keeping. Others claimed that chickens do not like

to be touched and that they try to avoid regularly touching theirs (Mark and Fred). There are marked differences I observed in how chicken keepers catch, touch, and hold chickens. While novice keepers can be worried about hurting their hens when they catch and hold them (such as Ella or city farm volunteers), more knowledgeable chicken keepers “just grab them anywhere” (Simon).

I used Marvin’s (2005) different ways of looking at animals to explore the visual engagements of keepers with chickens. Several chicken keepers mentioned that they regularly watch and observe their chickens for long periods of times, spending time with them in the outdoors. Regularly, but spontaneously, keepers see their chickens through their window in their garden and watch them for shorter periods from the indoors. Keepers such as Bob, Dora and Sue told me that they find watching their chickens entertaining and therapeutic. The individuality of their chickens, their relationships with each other, the pecking order, but also their personalities/characters are aspects that chicken keepers focus on when they observe their chickens. I also mentioned less focused and purposeful visual engagements of keepers with chickens. Keepers live with chickens, being aware of their presence and at times appreciating in the movements and colours they add to their garden. As Alice put it “it adds a dimension to the garden. [Without them] it’s like having a fish tank with no fish”. In ways similar to the movements and colours that chickens add to the garden landscape (Andy and Alice), chicken sounds change how a home is experienced. The diversity of clucking and sounds chickens make creates a soundscape which comforts keepers such as Mark and Simon, making them feel at home and safe.

Finally, I discussed Grasseni's (2005) work on cattle breeders and her concept of 'skilled vision' that is related to Palsson's (1994) enskilment theory. Skilled vision is the product of social learning and situated, skilful knowledge of individuals. Trained vision, knowing what and how to look at cattle is important for Grasseni's cattle breeders. For chicken keepers, skilled vision as described by Grasseni, is important in their care of chickens. Their regular observation does not only bring enjoyment to the keepers but also provides keepers with information about the health of their hens. Unusual behaviour in an individual chicken, the colour and consistency of chicken faeces are important visual clues that keepers only discover and notice after becoming enskilled. I extended Grasseni's theory which focuses on vision and highlighted the importance of the other senses, such as skilled ears, touch and nose.

In the next chapter, I will continue to explore animal classification with concepts from animal geography, as I have done in this chapter. In contrast to this chapter, however, I will relate animal classification and the spatial contexts with the attitudes chicken keepers have towards their chickens.

7 Edible pets – transgressing boundaries

This chapter examines attitudes chicken keepers have towards chickens and the boundaries between the human and non-human spheres. I do this by exploring instances of discrepancies in traditional ways of categorising animals. My research is based on the literature from Douglas (1978), Lynn (1998), Holloway (2001), Wilkie (2010), Latimer (2013) and Mullin (2013). The empirical material derives from interviews with and observations of Andy, Shannon & Jamie, Katie, Amy, Sue, Mark, Francine, Alda and Anna. Furthermore this chapter is based on material I collected through my involvement and regular participation in a city farm planning committee and my virtual ethnography.

The aim of this chapter is to disentangle the diverse perceptions and attitudes chicken keepers have towards their chickens and to highlight the positions chickens have in their homes. While chickens have been culturally perceived as livestock and productive animals, lately they have been increasingly classified as pets and as animals standing between the binary classification of livestock and pet. This in-between classification has been described by small-scale chicken keepers (such as in books written by keepers about their experiences: Hollander 2010; Baldwin 2012; Hinkinson 2013; Paul 2013) and by human-animal studies scholars (Holloway 2001; Wilkie 2010; Karabožhilova et al. 2012; Mullin 2013).

I will reflect on differences in the ways chicken keepers relate to their chickens and engage in the practice of chicken keeping: the utilitarian perspective and the perspective of chickens as companion animals and pets. I chose to discuss several themes touching upon instances when the traditional classifications of animals as companions or as productive

animals are challenged. Before engaging in the discussion of my ethnographic material I will review the literature on productive animal/livestock, pets, and companion animals.

I will then discuss my ethnographic material in three sections: first I discuss the different identities chickens take depending on the situation and place, then I engage in the utilitarian perspective towards chicken keeping, and finally various practices (such as feeding, naming, and slaughtering) related to chicken keeping are described.

7.1 Livestock, pets, and companion animals

In the next few paragraphs I will review and relate literature on two crucial animal categories for this work: pets (and often synonymously used companion animals) and livestock. Often these categories are treated as opposites and are related to by using other dichotomies. Benton (1993) parallels the livestock/pet categories with the subject/object dichotomy: commercial livestock is generally objectified and humans detach themselves from these animals emotionally and pets are related to as subjects and related to as near-human being. This division is also echoed by Holloway (2001), who divides the category 'tame animals' into pets that are like people, and livestock that is not. Serpell (2014) argues that while livestock is kept for their productive qualities and for their value as producers of commodities, pets "are kept for no obvious practical or economic purpose (2014, 11). However, Tuan (1984) suggests that they do have a purpose and that "pets exist for human pleasure and convenience" (1984, 88). According to Ogden et al. (2013), pets have near-human status and are generally considered not-killable/inedible in contrast to productive animals that are killable/edible. Serpell (2014, 11) also stresses that

humans emotionally (and financially) invest into their pets and that they are considered inedible:

Pets are raised, suckled if necessary, and cherished like children. They are protected, named, and cared for during life and, after death, they are often mourned. Pet animals, may, in addition, serve practical functions but they are not indulged for this reason. The mere idea of killing and eating them is typically greeted with horror.

While for Serpell (2014) the 'inedible' attribute is a characteristic of the animal category pet, Berger (1980, 5) believes that pets do not have to be inevitably inedible. He stresses that the emotional attachment to an animal does not automatically mean that they cannot be killed:

A peasant becomes fond of his pig and is glad to salt away its pork. What is significant, and is so difficult for the urban stranger to understand, is that the two statements in that sentence are connected by an *and* and not by a *but*.

Following Berger's (1980) argument, Holloway (2001, 298) states that "animals can be beloved companions *and* eaten for a meal", especially in hobby-farming settings, where relationships are often ambiguous.

There are also several clear similarities between the categories pets and livestock that are explored by scholars of human-animal studies and animal geographers. Livestock and pets are domestic animals and defined by Noske (1997, xii) as "animals that have been

structurally incorporated into human lives”, placing both categories into the human sphere. According to Tuan (1984) both human-pet and human-livestock relationships are characterised by human dominance over the animal, albeit with a crucial difference: While dominance in combination with cruelty and exploitation would create a victim (such as the exploitation of livestock), the pet relationship combines human domination with affection. The pet’s dependence on humans to be fed and to be taken for exercise, or even the act of touching pets and restricting their free movement are all examples of the exertion of human power over animals.

Animal geographers consider where animals are kept and how they are consequently classified. Tuan (1984) mentions the spatial distance of livestock from the human sphere and mirrors it with the human-pet relationship, stating that there are “front-stage” and “back stage” practices (1984, 109) (practices related to livestock mostly remain back stage). Front-stage practices are connected to the human pleasures of the human-pet relationships such as the playing, feeding, and touching of pets and back-stage practices are related to turning animals into better pets such as behaviour training, castration and body modifications (such as tail docking) among other procedures.

As discussed previously in chapter 3, Irvine (2004) makes a clear distinction between pets and companion animals. She builds on Tuan’s (1984) theory on the role of dominance, and states that that in contrast to the human-pet relationship, the human-companion animal relationship is based on accepting and respecting the animal for what it is and not what it could be. Subsequently, back-stage practices as described by Tuan (1984) are therefore kept to a minimum.

Philo and Wolch (1998) also map animal categories according to a spatial continuum in relations to human/non-human spaces. Wild or feral animals belong to a wilderness beyond human civilisation. When they are found to transgress these spatial boundaries, they are considered out of place and potentially cause issues (such as foxes in the city). On the other extreme are companion animals that are tame and welcomed into human domestic spaces such as “the home, yard, and immediate residential neighbourhood” (Philo & Wolch 1998, 110). Philo and Wolch place productive animals between these extremes, as they are located in specialised spaces such as farms, field and markets, which are not domestic but also not wilderness.

7.2 Living alongside crocodiles, vandals, and companions

Depending on the situations and the attitudes of humans, animals can assume different identities, positions, and roles in their lives. The situation and (spatial) context dependent attitudes and moral values humans have towards animals has also been discussed by Lynn (1998) who built on Haraway’s (1991) notion of ‘situated knowledge’. Lynn (1998) calls his notion ‘situated moral knowledge’ and emphasises the importance of the spatial context in the production of moral relations to animals. I refer to Lynn’s situated moral knowledge as the focus on the spatial context proved to be a useful perspective in exploring how keepers relate to their chickens. The starting point is the physical separation of the lives of chickens and keepers and the instances when this boundary is transgressed.

Chicken keepers and chickens spend most of their days and their nights separated from each other. The chicken keepers live inside their houses and chickens are usually kept outside the human living space spending their days in a yard or garden and their nights in a

shelter that is provided by the chicken keepers to protect them from predators and weather. Chickens cannot control when they defecate which, according to Katie, is the main reason why she cannot allow her chickens to spend time inside. During one of my visits, after a tour of the garden, Katie and I went inside to make a cup of tea. Soon Katie's hens approached, slowly wandering over the threshold inside the house (Figure 65). Katie laughed and described their behaviour as inquisitive, curious, and cheeky and that they knew that they were not allowed to come inside but they took every opportunity to explore it. Sometimes, she told me, she permits them to wander inside a bit further but never beyond the kitchen area.



Figure 65 Chickens entering Katie's house

Amy also sometimes allows her chickens to explore the inside of her house. Amy lives with her two young children and her husband in London and she keeps 21 hens in her garden. She quit her office job a few years ago and created a small business based on her interest in food sustainability and in living-off-the-land as much as she can. She teaches classes for people who would like to learn how to grow vegetables, to make bread, about food preservation and how to keep bees and chickens. Often, Amy told me, she sits at the table in her conservatory where she likes to work on her laptop and watches her hens outside in her garden. When I asked her if she ever lets her hens walk inside the house, she explained to me that she does not consciously let them in but that seeing her chickens wander in her house is not an absolute taboo to her:

Well, when I leave the door to the conservatory open, during summer, they do wander in quite often. Often I cook or do other things in the house or in the garden and I don't pay attention to them. I don't really mind. Once a neighbour rang my bell because she wanted to give me some greens she bought on the farmers market and when I chatted to her at the door she looked straight past me. She saw a chicken walking through the kitchen! She must have thought it so strange...I try to imagine how she must have felt because it is not strange to me at all to see a chicken in the kitchen. I guess it must be the equivalent of me seeing a crocodile or something.

While Amy would not deliberately let her chickens in the indoors, she is not too concerned about them exploring the indoors during dry days and it does not feel unusual for her to see chickens in her living space. There are other examples when chickens are accepted to move

around inside; one of my interviewees, Catherine, who I have mentioned on several occasions in previous chapters (she keeps framed pictures of her hens in her living room and she cannot bring herself to eat the eggs of her chickens), allows her hen to sit next to her on her couch while watching television. Catherine specified that she would allow this to happen only with one specific hen on dry summer days. Several chicken keepers told me that they take hens inside when they are unwell, keeping them in a box or towel or as in the example of the hen in Figure 66 when the hen was unwell and a warm bath in a cooking pot and treatment with Vaseline was the chosen method to improve its health (see Figure 66).



Figure 66 Hen in a warm water bath in a pot

Sue defines her relationship with her chickens based on this strict spatial separation of her chickens' living space in the garden and the human indoor space. Sue told me that her chickens are pets but that she still has a different relationship to them than she would have to a cat or a dog. Sue says the difference is that they do not live *with* the chickens as they would live with a dog or a cat. While she names her chickens as she would name other pets, she refers to them as both her pets and as farm animals, making these terms not exclusive

to each other. She also described how the behaviour of chickens might contribute to differences in how she perceives her chickens compared with other pets:

It's not about touch...I would say I cuddle them equally. But chickens live outside, and the dog is permanently with us. And I think the main difference is that the dog is more into us, but the chickens are more into what they do. They are social animals...but they are very independent.

Chickens live outdoors with their own routines, relationships and dynamics between each other, separated from the lives of their humans living beside them. Similarly to Sue above, Mark who was a keeper in focus in chapter 3 'Classifying chickens' and chapter 6 'Feeling (for) chickens' appreciates the rhythm and independence of his chicken's lives. Both spend time watching their chickens interact with each other and move around their garden. Yet Mark told me that he does not expect them to truly engage with him as they live in a parallel world, having only little non-food related interest in their human keepers. Latimer (2013) suggests that some human-animal relationships are characterised by partial connections, emphasising both the connections and the separations between humans and animals. She describes her relationships to her pets and introduces "the notion of 'being alongside' as a form of dwelling" (2013, 22), contrasting it to Haraway's ideas on human-animal assemblages and hybrids. Latimer (2013) engages with Haraway's (2007) concept of the inevitability of becoming human *with* and *because* of our relations and connections to non-human animals.

Latimer's perspective (2013) creates a space for different kinds of relationships that humans can have with animals they live with, thinking of them in instances of separation and

connections. Chicken keepers such as Mark, Dora, Catherine, Ellie and Holly get up every morning to feed their chickens and let them out of their enclosures, collect their eggs, watch them and spend time with them while they move and scratch around their garden and they are always aware of their obligations towards the animals they share their homes with. Their homes, lives, and routines are changed because of the presence of their chickens, but while they meet every day, their chickens still spend most of their lives physically separated, left to interact with each other as a flock, not concerned with their humans' emotions and needs, living alongside rather than with their humans.

The fact that chickens live outdoors and are often left to roam free in the yard or garden can also cause issues for keepers with a vegetable or ornamental garden. One of the themes, which emerged especially through my virtual ethnography on Facebook and by reviewing relevant book sections and newspaper articles (Thear 2006; Shooter 2011; Cawthray 2014), is that novice chicken keepers are often concerned about the compatibility of their well-tended garden with free-roaming chickens. The editor of the *Your Chickens* magazine wrote about this concern on their website (McEwan 2014):

One issue which comes up time and again in *Your Chickens* is how to prevent the birds from causing damage in the garden. We frequently hear from perplexed chicken keepers who want their birds to free range, yet are shocked at the damage they can do to carefully cultivated flower borders and vegetable beds.

Perplexed and shocked are words that also describe the personal, probably exaggerated, account of Shooter (2011), a British chicken keeper, who shares her experiences with keeping chickens in her garden in a Daily Mail article:

There's a gang of vandals who keep targeting my garden. Every time I clear up the mess, or just after the gardener has come and helped me with some new planting, they are back, hell-bent on destruction. Flowers and herbs are ripped to shreds, fruit is torn from its bushes before it has time to ripen. My shrubs have their roots exposed and the lawn is covered in soil, kicked from the beds.

In the narratives in the beginning of the section, chickens were perceived as curious, cheeky guests (Katie) who generally do not belong in the indoors (referred to as crocodiles by Amy), but are at times accepted indoors (Katie, Amy and Catherine). In the situation that Shooter describes, chickens take on the identity of destructors and uninvited vandals. She goes on to explain that she originally wanted to keep chickens to “teach my children where food really comes from, and desperate for a little injection of the Good Life into our technology-filled existence”. Her chickens were acquired to fulfil a purpose, as educational tool for her children and, I argue, in fulfilment of a nostalgic yearning for the simple life, the good life. The author goes on to describe the difficulties of dealing with the destruction of her garden and disenchantment of her idea of what keeping chickens would entail: “perhaps the biggest problem with backyard chickens is poo. Chickens, it emerges, poo A LOT. And very messily.”

The spatial context is only one perspective that can frame the exploration of the relationships chicken keepers have with their chickens. Chickens are often kept for a purpose, such as educational lessons, as Shooter mentioned in the quote above. The notion of keeping animals for a purpose, in contrast to others who are kept for non-utilitarian reasons and no specific purpose, will guide the next section in this chapter.

7.3 The purpose of chickens

I attended several meetings of an initiative dedicated to creating a new city farm in London. The group of local community members, some of them small-scale chicken keepers, founded this initiative having the strong wish to create a city farm with livestock in a small park in London. The focus of the meetings lay on developing applications to funding bodies and on getting the support of the local community and council. During one of the meetings the group discussed the content of a feasibility study that needed to be prepared for the local council representatives. One key discussion point was to find justifications for getting animals on the city farm. They justified each species they wanted to keep at the farm with a *purpose* this animal would fulfil.

Chickens for the eggs;

Goats for the milk and cheese;

Ducks for the eggs;

Rabbits for therapeutic purposes.

Some animal species are inherently associated with serving a purpose. Chickens belong to this category, together with others that are classified as farm animals or livestock such as the animals in the quote above. Chickens are perceived to serve as productive animals, providing eggs and meat for human consumption. As I mentioned in the Introduction, we were and are exposed to the imaginaries of productive animals as part of a rural idyll. Reflections of these imaginaries can be found in the living-off-the-land movement and the

surge for more self-sufficiency, such can be seen in the television series *The Good Life* - chickens are the first animals the family gets to achieve more self-sufficiency.

But the production of eggs (and meat) is not the only way chicken keepers use their chickens. In response to the concern of chicken keepers about their chickens' roles as destructor and vandals in their garden Andy Cawthray and Francine Raymond started to talk about the possibility of using chickens in the garden. Both are authors and journalists who wrote regular chicken advice columns about chicken keeping and started to focus on describing how to manage and control chickens in a garden and how to combine chickens and gardening, making "chickens work for you" (interview with Andy). Again, the emphasis lies on the productive qualities and purpose of chickens (quoting Andy):

They work for me as well, so... In the winter, when I let them in the vegetable garden, or at least a very small flock of them in the vegetable garden, and they go around and find all the worms and the grubs and leatherjackets [soil-dwelling larvae] and all that sort of stuff and as long as I don't have any greens in there [...] they just clear off everything: they pick off the berries and the raspberries that have finished and things like that. They clean that part and then, while doing that, they fertilize that part of the land too. And if I want a particular area of land to be tended to then we put an ark on that and the birds just stick with that particular part of the bed and they really turn it over. [...] As long as they don't stock them too heavily, then gardens and chickens do mix.

Francine, who is an established writer focusing on gardening and chicken keeping, also emphasises the importance of keeping the suitable number of chickens in a garden. She

wrote a book on how to combine gardening and chicken keeping (Raymond 2001). When Francine showed me her home and I complimented her on her beautiful garden, she responded:

Yes, you wouldn't notice that I have any chickens in this garden. The thing is to not have too many...I mean most people have half a dozen and that's crazy. Start with two and then you can always get more. I mean if you start with six they will all start laying at the same time and they will all die at the same time. [...] Because I am a gardener as well, I am thinking whether the garden would suffer. And I would keep [a maximum of] ... 4 [chickens], I mean some people would keep 10 in a space like this, but I am more interested that everybody is happy.

Francine and Andy consider their chickens a dynamic element in a garden ecosystem that one has to consider and work with. "Really the best place to actually keep chickens, I think is in an orchard, where you won't really disturb anything. And they will eat the fruit once it rots" (Francine in interview). Francine is a gardener who follows the principles of permaculture that are based on the idea that gardeners should utilise natural resources and control energy flows. Permaculture is a strategy for farmers and gardeners and one of its principles is to achieve a cycling of energy, nutrients and resources. Francine allows her hens to forage her garden and compost, eating and picking up rotting fruits and plants and she covers vegetable patches, flowerbeds, and her herb garden with netting to protect it from the hens. Francine, as do other chicken keepers who also enjoy to work in the garden, uses chicken faeces in compost as fertiliser, using the bodily products of chickens once more.



Figure 67 Eggshells are dried with the oven and then fed to the chickens

Most keepers who were also active gardeners mentioned the benefits of chicken faeces as fertiliser for their vegetables and flowerbeds. On a community farm I stayed at, chicken faeces were collected in a garden bin and later diluted with water to be used in liquid form, rather than applying them directly onto vegetable beds. More frequently, however, as in case of Francine, Andy and Mark, chicken keepers compost all or parts of the chicken faeces. Creating and maintaining compost is an art, Mark's wife Alda explained to me at one point. Adding too much faeces, too much dry leaves or wet greens, can lead to the wrong composition and create bad compost. In January, Alda adds a layer of compost to her vegetable beds to prepare the soil for the new phase of production. Shannon and Jamie, smallholders I stayed with for a few weeks, who also keep chickens and compost their faeces, explained that the reason chicken keepers do not directly mix chicken faeces in the

soil, is that it is 'too hot' and would burn plants in those beds. According to the Royal Horticultural Society (2016) fresh chicken faeces are alkaline and destroy plant roots.



Figure 68 Egg shells are used to grow seedlings and then directly planted in the soil

Andy and Francine let their chickens clean up parts of their garden by letting them eat rotting fruit and leftover berries, Mark feeds them kitchen scraps and other keepers use chicken faeces as fertiliser to provide nutrients for plants in a garden. These are all examples of keepers using their chickens' bodily products as a resource in the garden and evidence that chickens are perceived as productive animals that are kept for a purpose. Andy, Francine, Mark and Alda consider their chickens an element of the garden ecosystem and pursue the goal of making use of energy streams that can be used related to their chickens. The ambition is to create and close energy cycles such as described above. Chicken keepers consume the eggs of chickens and eggshells are used as a source of calcium fed back to the chickens by some chicken keepers (e.g. at the community farm I stayed at, see Figure 67 egg shells are dried in the bottom drawer). Eggshells are also used for growing seedlings in the

indoors which are later planted in a vegetable bed once they are large enough to survive in the outdoors (this method was used by Mark and Alda on their smallholding, see Figure 68).

On a website about the principles of biodynamics the chicken is explicitly mentioned and considered a valuable element of the garden ecosystem:

[The goal is] to recreate a self-sufficient ecosystem that is as close to their natural habitat as possible and recognises that the chickens play an integral role in that ecosystem, producing vital ingredients to ensure the dynamic recycling of nutrients. Starting with their habitat, an orchard with moveable housing would come pretty close to their natural environment. The chickens would be able to roam freely, scratching for and eating 'live' food such as worms and snails and damaging insects. They relish any fallen fruit and thus help prevent diseases from rotting fruit. In effect, they can be thought of as organic pesticides. They'll find their own small stones that they need to grind food in the gizzard. The trees would provide shade and cover from airborne predators whilst also offering the opportunity to perch high off the ground [emphasis added] (Moore 2014a).

The goal is to incorporate the chicken into an ecosystem that provides them with their (supposed) natural living environment and puts the chicken to work in the garden. I described in the beginning of this chapter different ways animal categories (especially pets and livestock) have been theorised by animal geographers. Philo and Wolch (1996) developed a concept that how we relate with animals on a spatial continuum reaching from the domestic, human sphere (often spaces that pets live in) and the wilderness (feral animal), with livestock being placed between these categories. When considering the role

of the chicken as part of the garden ecosystem (as it was done in the paragraphs above) the chicken moves further away from the human, domestic space and becomes part of the closest wilderness to the home, the garden ecosystem.

In the next section I describe several practices that are part of chicken keeping and what the differences in approaches and opinions reveal about how the keepers relate to their chickens.

7.4 Feeding, healing and hatching chickens

Embedded in the practices related to chicken keeping, such as the feeding or breeding of chickens, are the social and spatial structures and values and attitudes of the chicken keepers. In the following three sections, I explore three themes related to practices and different approaches and how chicken keepers perform these practices. The first theme is the feeding of chickens. I will then move towards practices related to dealing with health issues, and finally discuss practices related to the hatching of chicks.

7.4.1 Feeding chickens

For Anna eggs are not the main incentive for keeping chickens. Most of her chickens are pretty, fluffy Bantams and she explained to me that she really thinks of them as pets. Her father keeps chickens and she grew up with them at home: “I love them, they are close to my heart.” Anna, her husband and their two young children only rarely eat their chickens’ eggs. She says they keep their chickens purely as pets and they do not really like their eggs. Anna feeds them corn and sunflowers but also brioche and anything she thinks they would like to eat.

I don't feed them pellets because I think they don't like it. It doesn't taste like anything. They prefer to eat corn. I used to feed them pellets but they start rotting on the ground and they stink so I stopped feeding it to them. I feed them what they want and only things that I would like to eat myself.

Anna anthropomorphises her chickens, feeding them food that she considers tasty, because she believes this is what they would like to eat. She is not concerned with whether these choices are an appropriate diet for her chickens. Feeding chickens foods other than pellets or grains is a common practice among chicken keepers who I visited and who I observed discussing in Facebook groups. Anna, Alice, Holly and other chicken keepers



Figure 69 Hentastic treat stick (Source: BHW n.d.)

supply their chickens on a regular basis with food items that they refer to as treats. Yoghurt, cheese, porridge, cabbage, peas and berries among many other foods are frequently purchased especially for their chickens. There are recipes for treats and crafting instructions for treat dispensers for chickens available online on blogs and on Facebook. Furthermore the pet food industry started to focus on small-scale chicken keepers in recent years and now there is a selection of treats and items available online on commercial sites such as eglu.co.uk, littlepeckers.co.uk and hensforpets.co.uk. An example of a popular chicken treat is the 'Hentastic chicks stick feeder' shown in Figure 69.

In contrast to Anna or Holly who regularly purchase chicks stick treats, keepers with a utilitarian approach towards chicken keeping, who consider the purpose and productive qualities of their chickens as I described above, do not necessarily buy or cook treats and food especially for their chickens.



Figure 70 Mark's chickens are fed with kitchen scraps

They do, however, still feed their chickens with food that was originally meant for human consumption by feeding them kitchen scraps. Typically, they feed their chickens kitchen scraps supplementary to layer pellets and often let them roam free to forage in their garden. It appeals to them that they can use food waste as a resource that contributes to the production of food at their homes (see for example Mark, Andy, and one of the community farms I stayed at, among many other examples).

Mark is a chicken keeper with a utilitarian approach towards chicken keeping, as I described in chapter 3 'Classifying chickens'. He appreciates and perceives his chickens as flock rather than as individuals. Mark collects kitchen scraps such as old bread, pasta, and vegetables in a metal bucket next to the sink and besides a second bin for domestic waste. Furthermore,

he has an arrangement with the staff of a local supermarket and around twice per week he picks up spoiled vegetables that they keep for him. It is not so much about saving money, he explained, than about trying to avoid wasting food and turning it into new food. However, the second and I suspect equally important reason for Mark to feed kitchen scraps to his chickens is that he believes, similarly to Anna, that a diet based only on layer pellets is not good for his chickens' well-being. In contrast to Anna, Mark is not concerned about whether the food looks tasty to humans, but Mark explained to me that they need and yearn for greens and diversity and he provides them with it on a regular basis (Figure 70 Mark's chickens eating the kitchen scraps he feeds them).

Several of the chicken keepers I talked to (such as Anna, Mark, Holly and Hillary) and chicken keepers discussing online in Facebook groups and on blogs I followed, feed their chickens treats and/or kitchen scraps on a regular or even daily basis. This is especially notable, because according to a DEFRA regulation it is illegal to feed food that has been kept or prepared in a non-vegan kitchen. The exact wording of this regulation on the DEFRA (2014b) governmental website is as follows:

There is a complete ban on using kitchen waste from non-vegan households and from catering waste containing products of animal origin. It is illegal to use catering waste from kitchens which handle meat, or vegetarian kitchens which may handle dairy products, eggs etc. This ban also includes catering waste from restaurants and commercial kitchens producing vegan food.

This regulation is discussed frequently in the comment sections below newspaper articles online and blog entries and in Facebook groups on this topic. Most chicken keepers describe

it as restrictive and are generally confused about the rationale behind this DEFRA regulation. They believe it prevents them from making use of kitchen waste and turning waste into a resource and often ignore this law. Andy Cawthray is a chicken keeper and journalist who specialises in writing about small-scale chicken keeping for *The Guardian*. On his own blog *The Chicken Street* he thoroughly discusses and criticises this DEFRA law in a blog article. On his blog he writes:

Granted there are certain things from the household kitchen that should not be fed to chickens but my argument is that rather than apply a blanket ban that could never be policed at a small flock level and fails to have a scalable impact in its application, why not instead draw that line at the 50 bird mark again but ensure that correct education is given to reduce the probability of the risk occurring. In fact take it one step further and show people how to economically and healthily feed their birds the correct 'waste' from their households as a contribution towards improved sustainability.

Andy later explained to me in an interview that there are methods for preparing kitchen scraps in a way that reduces the potential risk of contamination, turning it into feed saved for the consumption of chickens. As he also described in the quote above, he thinks that DEFRA should focus on educating chicken keepers about these methods rather than just making the feeding of kitchen scraps illegal. Below Andy's blog entry, a reader commented: "It's so bad that if you picked an apple off your tree and walked through the kitchen with the apple in your pocket, it would be illegal to feed it to your chicken. Perfectly preposterous." There are numerous similar comments made online and offline (e.g.

Shannon, Mark, Amy and many others) by keepers who expressed their frustration and lack of understanding for this regulation.

Before the commercialisation of specialised chicken feed products, chickens were often kept exclusively on kitchen scraps and let to forage in the yard and garden area. During war times, as part of the Dig For Victory campaign, the British government especially encouraged the provision of kitchen scraps for chickens for the production of eggs and meat at home. The law prohibiting the use of kitchen scraps was created by DEFRA following the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak in 2001 and has been retained ever since. In a conversation with DEFRA employees who work as part of the smallholder working group, I mentioned the concerns and frustrations that small-scale chicken keepers have about the law that forbids them to feed kitchen scraps or theoretically even food items that were kept for a short duration in the kitchen. I was told that these regulations are crucial for ensuring the prevention of livestock related disease outbreaks such as the Foot and Mouth Disease. There are currently no plans to change this law and future plans are to better educate chicken keepers (and more generally smallholders) about the law.

It is also illegal to feed chickens dried mealworms, a very popular treat that chicken keepers buy and feed to their chickens. According to Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA 2017, 1) [emphasis added]:

the competent authority may authorise the importation of certain materials *for purposes other than feeding to farmed land animals (except for feeding to fur animals)* provided there is no unacceptable risk for the transmission of disease communicable to humans or animals.

At the moment, processes related to the production of dried mealworms are not regulated and therefore it cannot be guaranteed that these products are free of pathogens and other harmful substances. Interestingly, the regulation distinguishes between fur and feathered animals, focusing especially on feathered farmed animals. From January 2014 until early 2016, several commercial sites with a strong focus on the small-scale chicken keeping market stopped offering dried mealworms in their poultry product catalogue online. FlyteSoFancy published following statement on their website (it has since been removed):

The animal health authority (AHVLA) have advised us that it is illegal to market dried mealworms & insects as treats for chickens. Due to these EC regulations, which are still in dispute, we are compelled to remove mealworms & insects from our chicken treat section and they will now only be available in our dried mealworms for garden birds section.

While Flyte so Fancy and other commercial companies, recently started offering dried mealworms in their poultry treats sections again, they still do not specifically mention chickens or other poultry in its product description. On Omlet's website, for example, the product details for dried mealworms do not contain the word chicken but it says that "mealworms are a great treat for wild birds, particularly because of the protein content" (Omlet n.d.-h).

According to the cited APHA regulation , chickens are 'farmed land animals', whether they are perceived by their owners as pets or not. This point is crucial because by consuming the eggs of their chickens, humans become part of the food chain and could be exposed to

harmful substances or pathogens with the chicken meat and eggs they consume. Andy Cawthray has highlighted the ambiguous quality of consuming the bodily products of animals that you consider to be pets in a blog entry. He wrote a blog entry as a response to the strong opposition of small-scale chicken keepers to the illegality of feeding chickens dried mealworms treats. While Andy is critical about the DEFRA regulation on feeding kitchen scraps, he does support the DEFRA regulation on the prohibition of feeding dried mealworms. He argues that chicken keepers need to be careful about treating their chickens as pets: “Are chickens pets? Yes they can be but if you eat the eggs they produce then you must NEVER forget they are livestock and a farmed animal”.

DEFRA’s rules and agenda is experienced negatively by many small-scale chicken keepers (as seen on Facebook and remarks by chicken keepers I interviewed). This was also proven by an incident I was involved in on Facebook. After following and observing the discussions and postings in a Facebook group focused on chicken keeping in Britain for around one year, I decided to post an informal comment/question in a group. It was the first (and last) time I actively participated in a chicken keeping themed group. In my post, I introduced myself as a researcher studying the chicken keeping culture in the UK and as an active small-scale chicken keeper. I explained that I met with and talked to several chicken keepers who enjoy the eggs of their chickens, but that I only rarely found chicken keepers who also use their meat. Finally, I asked the community in this Facebook group whether they thought this was an uncommon practice in the UK. I did not anticipate the strong reactions and comments that were made in response to my post. Apart from the majority of friendly comments of chicken keepers who stated that they could never eat their own pets, I was accused of being an unethical researcher and finally, most interestingly, of being a “DEFRA spy” (quote from Facebook comment).

Before this incident, I observed that some chicken keepers in Facebook groups and discussion forums seem to advise others to avoid registering their small flock with DEFRA (they are not required to if they keep fewer than 50 birds) because it was better that DEFRA did not have their contact details. The argument was that if there is a bird flu incident and their birds were within the 3km protection zone are part of their standard procedure, DEFRA could decide that it was best to cull all poultry within this zone. Should DEFRA have their contact details it would be easier for them to find and cull their pet chickens in case of a bird flu incident (as seen in several Facebook discussion expressed in postings and comments).

While my question about whether chicken keepers eat the meat of their chickens was not directly related to the above discussed conflict about feeding patterns and DEFRA, it does reveal an ambiguity in the classification of chickens and how this is expressed in tensions between public authorities and chicken keepers. DEFRA wants to protect the public and the environment from a possible biohazard and outbreak of diseases. Chickens are kept in the outdoors and could be exposed to viruses or bacteria through contact with wild birds. Small-scale chicken keepers on the other hand view their chickens primarily not as possible biohazards but as animals they grew attached to.

Mullin (2013) provides another example of the tension between how authorities and of chicken keepers classify their chickens and its effects in her ethnographic and partly auto-ethnographic study of the United States chicken keeping culture. When Mullin (2013) wanted to start keeping chickens she was told by city authorities that while farm animals were not permitted to be kept within the city borders, chickens were permitted as long as

they were kept as pets. She was concerned about this response as she was not clear about what the difference was between a chicken kept as pet and a chicken kept as livestock. When Mullin (2013) moved to a different US state and took her chickens with her, she was asked by the local authorities to fill out a form and get signed permissions to keep chickens from all bordering neighbours. Finally, while filling out this form it turned out to be unnecessary because her house and garden was located in a 'residential rural' zone where it was freely permitted to keep chickens. Again, as noted in the examples above there is a tension between chicken keepers and authorities. If chickens are considered farmed animals or pets by authorities (mealworms/kitchen scraps case above) and chicken keepers (Mullin's case in the US) dictates if they are permitted to be kept in a certain location or not. The categories pet or livestock/farmed/productive animal matter and impact on how chicken keepers interact with and are permitted to interact with their chickens according to official authorities. In the next section of this chapter I will challenge the fluidity of these categories a bit further by describing practices related to how small-scale chicken keepers deal with ill or dead chickens.

7.4.2 Vets or DIY chicken health

Humans deal with the death of animals in diverse ways - depending on the kinds of relationships and attitudes they had towards the animal. Animal species, such as dogs, cats, guinea pigs – in Western countries traditionally kept as pets, when ill are taken to the small-animal veterinarian who are often specialised in treating these animals today (Morris 2012). This was not always the case. Until the mid-twentieth century veterinarians were mostly responsible for treating and maintaining the health and increasing the productivity of farmed animals (Morris 2012). In the time prior to small-animal

veterinarians, pet keepers felt themselves responsible for the health of their pets and “when it came to ending the lives of suffering or unwanted animals, they ‘put them down’ at home” (Morris 2012, 345). The act of ending the suffering of ill animals at home later was considered cruel or inhumane (Grier 2006). Due to this lack of social acceptance for causing the death of pet animals at their keepers’ homes, pet owners now mostly end the lives of their pets indirectly through euthanasia performed by small-animal veterinarians.

With chickens being kept in small numbers by small-scale chicken keepers and often referred to as pets, it would be expected that they welcome the services of small-animal veterinarians for treating their ill chickens. However, small-animal veterinarians are not always knowledgeable in treating the specific illnesses and health issues that individual chickens frequently suffer of (mentioned by several interviewees, see examples in the following paragraphs).

Animals that have been bred especially for their productive qualities, as are many breeds that are kept by small-scale chicken keepers, have very specific health issues not necessarily familiar to small-animal veterinarians. Chickens, which are egg-bound (they are not able to lay their fully developed egg), or have a bumblefoot (an abscess on the foot) or an impacted or sour crop, are easily treated. I was, however, told that veterinarians did often not know how to effectively treat these conditions (e.g. Amy, who then informed herself online and treated the impacted crop at home or Dora who regularly receives calls from her local vet who asks for her advice as a knowledgeable chicken keeper).

Over the course of several months during my fieldwork, I observed that veterinarians noticeably worked on closing this gap in expertise of treating conditions of individual chickens. There are training courses created especially for educating veterinarians in health issues and treatments of individual pet chickens. Furthermore, a website called The Chicken Vet provides small-scale chicken keepers with a way for finding veterinarians who are knowledgeable about treating chickens: “Here at The Chicken Vet we aim to provide owners of pet chickens, fancy fowl and small flock keepers advice on the care, health and well-being of their birds” (The Chicken Vet 2017).

To compensate for the lack of expertise, small-scale chicken keepers began seeking advice from pedigree breeders who are often extremely knowledgeable and have a closer social network between each other that enables them to develop and exchange expertise easier. The alternative, especially in rural areas, is to ask veterinarians specialised in treating livestock for advice, but is not always a straightforward solution. Shannon and Jamie with whom I stayed with for a longer duration, told me about their experiences with a veterinarian specialised in livestock. They sought the help of a veterinarian because they suspected that one of their chickens was infected with a viral disease. When they went to see the veterinarian they were told that individual chickens were not treated. The veterinarian only treated whole flocks and advised them to cull all of her chickens and start with a new flock, rather than investing in treating them, as it would be too expensive. After this experience, Shannon started to advise participants in her chicken keeping courses that before getting chickens they need to feel ready to treat their illnesses and, worst case, end the lives of their chickens because they could not rely on the help of small-animal and livestock veterinarians.

I discovered that the treatment of health issues of chickens at home is a common practice among small-scale chicken keepers. Especially for illnesses and health issues that do not require specialised medication, keepers tend to treat their chickens at home to avoid costs. As mentioned above, some seek advice on how to treat their ill chickens from pedigree breeders, but another popular and more accessible source of expertise is the Internet.

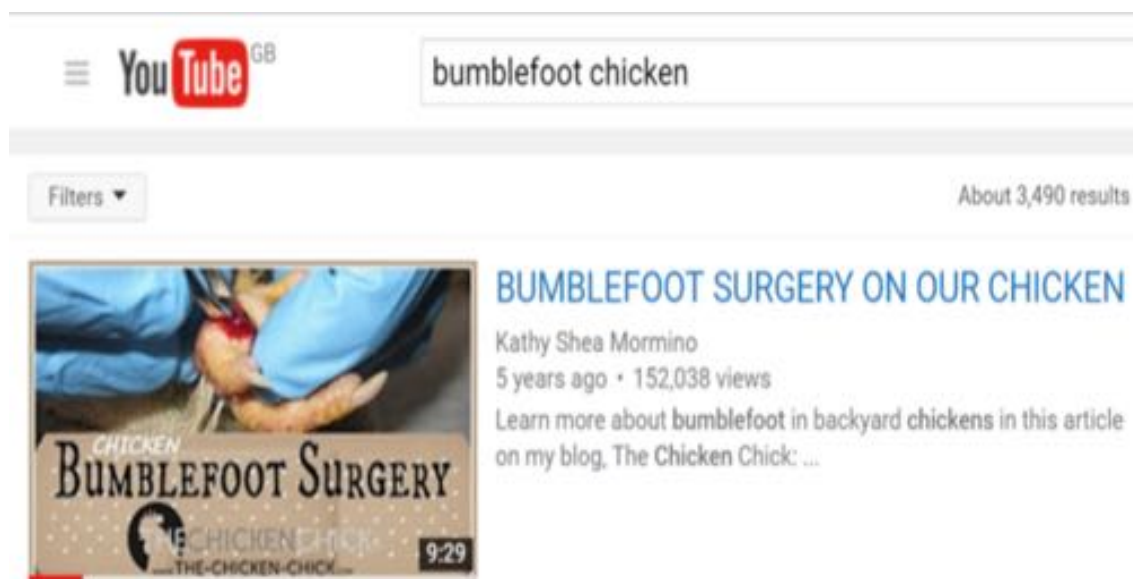


Figure 71 Instructional video on YouTube on how to perform a bumblefoot surgery on chickens (Source: Mormino n.d.)

Social networking groups, such as Facebook groups and the comment section of blogs, provide chicken keepers with the ability to share images and videos of their ill chicken and receive immediate advice from other chicken keepers who are part of these online communities. Through YouTube videos chicken keepers can watch others perform routine health checks on their chickens or even perform minor surgeries as it is advised in the case of the bumblefoot condition. There is an unanticipated high number of instructional videos available on YouTube that shows chicken keepers to treat the health issues of their own chickens – searching on YouTube for the keywords ‘bumblefoot’ and ‘chicken’ returns 3,490 videos with people performing this surgery and explaining how to perform it (see

Figure 71) (a majority of these instructional videos are recorded and uploaded by US chicken keepers).

The fact the home treatment of chickens is deemed socially acceptable is a decisive difference between how we perceive chickens compared with the attitudes we have towards other pets. Would it be acceptable to perform minor surgery on a cat, a guinea pig or a budgie? However, an even greater difference is how small-scale chicken keepers approach the question of whether it is time to end the life of a chicken and the manner in which they choose to end its life.

7.4.3 Hatching chicks and culling cockerels

Several chicken keepers told me that one of the parts they enjoy most about chicken keeping is to see a simple egg turn into a chick in only three weeks' time and to witness life develop inside the egg (I've mentioned some of these keepers, such as Dora, who used to breed chickens; Holly who keeps chickens on her allotment; Anna and Amy). As mentioned in chapter 5 'Apprenticeship in chicken keeping', chicken keepers 'candle' the eggs at different stages of development from the first week onwards to monitor whether there is a chick developing inside the egg or whether the egg is going bad and needs to be disposed of.¹²

¹² When hatching chicks at the University of Roehampton with Growhampton, I was warned on several occasions to be careful to dispose of bad eggs in time as they could explode!

While keepers enjoy the excitement of creating life and after the chicks hatched, observing and touching them, this process is also associated with challenges for small-scale chicken keepers. Half of the chicks that hatch will be cockerels and many chicken keepers I talked to cannot, or do not want to, keep multiple male chickens (Holly, Anna, Amy, Shannon & Jamie and Mark). Due to the high number of unwanted cockerels, it is not easy to find a person who takes them in. There is a Facebook group dedicated



Figure 72 Advertisements for free cockerels on Cockerel Trader, a Facebook group (Source: Cockerel Trader n.d.)

exclusively to solving this common cockerel problem. The group called ‘Cockereltrader’ gives chicken keepers the opportunity to advertise and give away their unwanted cockerels (see Figure 72). The incentive of potential new owners is that they want to save the lives of these cockerels, knowing that they will often end up being culled when they cannot find a new home for it.

Anna, one of the chicken keepers I visited, uses an incubator to hatch chicks every year. Anna lives in a residential urban environment and knows that her neighbors only tolerate her hens and hence would not accept cockerels crowing. Yet, Anna, does not want to give away her cockerels to unknown people she could find online, as many other chicken keepers do: “You never know where they end up. There are lots of people who use these

cockerels for cockfights". Anna tells me that she could not bear her cockerels being used in cockfights and therefore decided to find another solution for her regular cockerel problem. Every year, when Anna is sure about the sex of her young birds, she brings the cockerels to the small-animal veterinarian to euthanise them. She says that it is expensive, but that it is worth it and that it avoids unnecessary suffering. Veterinarians are faced with an ethical dilemma in these situations and might be unwilling to euthanise healthy young animals as noted by (Swabe 2000). Yet, I argue, in contrast to Swabe (2000) who considers in her article mainly the euthanasia of traditional pets, that chickens are animals that are killed for the benefit of humans every minute of every day. Therefore, the threshold might be lower for veterinarians to perform the procedure on chickens. This does not, however, diminish the ambiguous behaviour of Anna, who decisively mentioned that she considers her chickens to be pets only (she does not consume her chickens' eggs or their meat) and yet euthanises half of the healthy pets she keeps due to their sex.

Shannon told me in a conversation that she believes it is the keepers' own responsibility to deal with their cockerels and she communicates this also to her chicken keeping course participants. "I always tell people that before they decide to get their chickens they need to be ready to deal with sick chickens and they need to be able to kill their cockerels or pay lots of money to let a vet put them down". In another conversation, she told me that she believes chicken keepers who bring their cockerels to the vet to be put down or who give them away are acting cowardly because they do not deal with the problems they created. In a conversation with two chicken keepers I visited, Catherine and Dora, they described a conflict between two different groups of chicken keepers with differences in attitudes towards their chickens. Dora and Catherine told me that they could not cull their chickens but rather bring them to the veterinarian to be put down. They found that

because they were not able to kill their own chickens (in the event of illness or because they were unwanted chickens), they were exposed to hostile comments and mockery in Facebook groups when discussing this topic. People who showed hostility towards (self-proclaimed) pet chicken keepers were according to them “smallholders who see them as livestock and not as pets and who think that what we do is ridiculous”.

Ending the lives of chickens at home is a common practice among chicken keepers. Even when they do not consume the meat of their chickens after culling them, they often cull them when they believe they are in pain due to an injury or illness. A third of the chicken keepers I interviewed said that they or a friend or family members culled one of their chickens at their homes, opposed to two thirds of chicken keepers who found other solutions or have not been in this situation yet.

There is a diversity of expressions we use for the act of causing the death of animals. I used the term culling that is defined by the Oxford dictionary as “sending an inferior or surplus farm animal to be slaughtered” (Stevenson 2010c, 424). Culling is an expression that is frequently used by chicken keepers to refer to the killing of chickens at home for diverse reasons: hens that stopped being productive, cockerels that were raised until they began to crow and showed typical fighting behaviour, chicks that turned out male, or birds that were culled to end their apparent suffering. Marvin (2006, 3) lists a variety of terms that are used for causing the death of animals, “animals becoming extinct, killed, gassed, electrocuted, exterminated, hunted, butchered, vivisected, shot, trapped, snared, run over, lethally injected, culled, sacrificed, slaughtered, executed, euthanized, destroyed, put down, put to sleep”. Many of these terms are used for the death of chickens, but I would like to add one more expression that is used for the slaughter of chickens that is

‘dispatching’. I came across several from-hatch-to-dispatch courses designed to guide novice chicken keepers through the process of hatching chicks, rearing them and then turning the animals into meat ready to be consumed. The next section of this chapter is dedicated to the discussion of instances when chickens are both, edible and pets.

7.5 Productive pets

I grew up with chickens and kept them for 20+ years. They can make great pets, provided you take the time to look after them properly. Different breeds have different temperaments, some being great characters and very happy and responsive in human company. In my view people are negative about chickens as pets because they can't handle the fact that we arbitrarily sentimentalise some species as pets and designate others as dinner.

Quote by a chicken keeper with the online nickname ‘Angel_Eyes’ in response to an article about chicken keeping in Britain (Usborne 2017)

The fact that chickens are able to produce food is an important initial reason for people to start to keep chickens. The superior taste and texture of freshly, home-laid eggs were frequently praised by the chicken keepers I visited. The consumption of their chickens’ eggs does usually not stand in conflict with the perception of chickens as pets, knowing and appreciating them for their individuality and characters and naming them. “They are pets with benefits” as a Sarah, a chicken keeper I visited, phrased it - a pop-culture

reference to the widely known term 'friends with benefits'.¹³ Sarah implicitly defines pets as unproductive animals and the eggs her chickens lay are an addition to the pet status, being the primary benefit. When the benefit extends to the production of meat, the slaughter of chickens for their meat, the relationships that chicken keepers have with their chickens can become more complicated. Only a minority of chicken keepers I encountered and interviewed slaughtered their chickens for consumption. As Alice pointed out, the way people keep chickens has changed over time:

My great-auntie, during the war she lived in Hazelmere and my dad and auntie lived with her and she kept chickens. And they did lay eggs, but she kept them and ate them. And she hated it and after the war she said I would never want to have chickens again. She hated it because it was hard work and you had to go out there in the rain and in the mud and she had no inside bathroom. She wasn't enthusiastic at all when I told her that I got chickens. It was a different kind of chicken keeping, it was a necessity; it was for meat and eggs. I think if you don't really have that many and if you got to know their characters. And I think if they are just in cages in a shed, perhaps you don't think of them like that.

Keeping chickens was a necessity and the focus lay in producing food in form of meat and eggs. While today's chicken keepers often start to keep chickens because of the excitement of producing food at home, the reason for continuing to keep them becomes more about the affinity for the animals than about the supply of eggs. Keeping chickens can be hard work and as Alice pointed out it requires taking care of them independently

¹³ Friends with benefits are defined as friends who have sexual relations without being in a committed relationship.

from the weather condition. Now that eggs and chicken meat are readily available in supermarkets, keeping chickens is more than about the necessity of producing food at home.

I visited and talked to some chicken keepers who keep small flocks of chickens and who regularly slaughter some of them for consumption by themselves and their families. Amy is an urban chicken keeper who grew up in East London and started keeping chickens when her daughters were one and four years old. As I mentioned previously, Amy started because she became passionate about sustainable food and became increasingly aware that everything she and her family consume used to be alive, including plant-based products. She started keeping chickens because she found it to be the easiest way to produce food at home. Besides keeping chickens, she also began keeping bees for honey, baking sourdough bread and started spending more time growing vegetables and fruit in her garden. Amy told me that it provides her with great satisfaction to eat a meal that consists exclusively of home produced food items. But when I asked Amy why she keeps chickens and whether she keeps them mainly as a source of food, she gave me the following response:

I definitely don't keep them for the meat. It's a part of keeping chickens. I don't *like* to kill the cockerels, but if I get point-of-lay hens, the farmer who breed the hens, also will cull the unnecessary cockerels...like I would too. Nobody wants cockerels, except these few cockerels that are used for breeding. If I keep them mainly for the eggs, I would really only go for layer breeds like Leghorns or hybrids. But I keep different breeds because I like how they look and I breed them, so I

need breeds I can use for their meat. I want to eat the meat of the cockerels. I cannot do this with layers breeds.

While Amy does not keep her chickens for the meat, the eggs are a major motivation for keeping them. Because she also hatches chicks, she chooses to keep dual-purpose breeds that enable her to also use the meat of the chickens she culls. Later, Amy tells me that she perceives her chickens as pets, but not in the same way as she feels about her cat. Some acquaintances were shocked when Amy told them that she dispatches and eats her cockerels and asked her how she could do this to her pets.

I tell them that it's not like I would eat my cat. It's different and people need to understand that these chicken nuggets they keep eating used to be a living thing and someone had to kill it. [...] The cockerels I keep here are the oldest chicken you will eat. They are 5 months old. Chickens from supermarkets you usually eat are maybe 7 or 8 weeks old.

Amy names some of her chickens but not all of them. She told me that she wants to be at least sure that they are going to stay with her so they need to be mature enough so she can be sure that they are not cockerels that she would have to dispatch. She also said that she prefers hens to cockerels: "I don't care much for cockerels. When they are about three or four months old they become quite aggressive and they start fighting. But of course they are much more beautiful than hens". She only names hens and only the hens she can distinguish from the rest of the flock. "There are two Bantam Brahma hens and they look exactly the same. There is no point in naming them."

The effect naming¹⁴ has on the relationships and perceptions we have towards animals has been mentioned by Phillips (1994) and Wilkie (2010). Phillips (1994) who studied the relationship between scientists and laboratory animals, states that by naming “we socially construct individuals and create a narrative account of the meaning of their lives” (Phillips 1994, 121). We use names to talk to and about animals and the animal becomes an agent in their own life and receives a biography (Phillips 1994).

Chickens often are named once they are recognised as individuals, due to an incident that makes them different in the eyes of the keeper. Anna named a chicken that became her favourite, when she threw away a chick that she thought to have died, but later realised that she made a mistake due to loud chirping coming from the bin: she named it ‘Bin chick’ and frequently referred to this descriptive name when telling me about this chicken in other contexts. Chickens are also named after specific characteristics such as Houdini, a chicken that could escape from any enclosure or Goldie who was of a bright yellow, golden colour. Names such as Herb and Mango (a Nando’s sauce) or Drumstick are also popular chicken names playing on the ambiguous and ironic fact that chickens are both the most popular fast food meat and kept as pets. The most common names are however decisively female names, which were most popular in the last 19th century, such as Tillie, Mabel and Maude. I will turn to discuss the choice of these names in chapter 8 ‘Living the good life – Nostalgia for the rural idyll’.

Ending the life of an individual, named, chicken is harder than killing a nameless chicken without a biography. If people name their chickens very much depends on the number of

¹⁴ I will discuss the names chicken keepers I encountered gave to their chickens in the next and final chapter of this thesis.

chickens they keep. People with three chickens are more likely to name them than people with 20 chickens. Some chicken keepers only name few individual chickens in their flock when they notice special characteristics or behaviour in a chicken. Amy named hens that stayed with her for a longer duration, but only hens that she can identify as individuals, clearly distinguishable from the rest of the flock. Wilkie (2010) writes about hobby farmers and their relationships to their productive animals. She quotes a hobby farmer who mentions the importance of the action of naming: “everything on the farm here that hasn’t got a name is available for freezer goods. If it’s named, we tend to give it a decent Christian burial” (Wilkie 2010, 151).

7.5.1 Freeloading hens

An interesting narrative that illustrates the confusion over the ambiguous classification of chickens was shared by Hollander (2010) in a book she wrote about her experiences with chicken keeping. Towards the end of the book she shared the story of her culling one of her hens. At this point, her other hen had passed away in the summer. The remaining hen, which she named Ruby, was now alone and started to lay less frequently with autumn and the cooler months approaching.

But as the days shortened, her egg production went down. And down. By September, my reliable one-a-day bird was laying only three eggs a week, large and sometimes fragile. She looked happy enough, was eating and pooing and pecking perfectly normally, but I decided the reduction in eggs was a sign she was pining.

Hollander (2010, 174) notes in the quote above that the quantity and quality (“sometimes fragile” eggs) was declining and decides that while Ruby seemed to behave normally that the hen must be suffering. Furthermore, she reflected on the consequences of the declining egg production: “at this rate she was going to produce a maximum of 150 eggs. Meanwhile, I would be spending about £40 on her feed” (2010, 174). Hollander decided to cull her hen due to the costs of keeping her without receiving enough eggs in return (‘spent’ hens are often referred to as “freeloading hens”). She told her friend who also keeps chickens about it, who was hesitant to agree that culling the hen was the right choice. In an effort to persuade her friend that this was an ethical decision Hollander responds that “if we’re not prepared to kill, then we shouldn’t be eating meat...”.

Yet later, Hollander refers to her hen as ‘pet’ and reflects on her decision to cull her pet – or rather justifying her decision: “even when Ruby stopped laying completely, I might feel she was worth it because of all she had given me in the past. But for how long?” (2010, 174). Finally, she decides that death was also better for Ruby: “I needed to concentrate not on my needs but on Ruby’s, here and now. Was it kind to keep her on her own like this? Might it not be better to put her out of her misery?” (2010, 175) After concluding that she would cull Ruby, Hollander (2010, 175) put herself in her hen’s position: “If the death were mine I would prefer it safe at home, in the arms of my carer.”

Hollander clearly struggled with the ambiguous position this animal took in her life. On the one hand, it was socially acceptable to end the life of a chicken, but on the other hand, her chicken provided her with eggs, was named, and was considered by her and her family as pet. To justify her decision to slaughter the hen (which she also prepared and ate later) she argues that it was better for the hen as she was suffering being kept alone. In the end,

Hollander ironically puts herself in the hen's position, anthropomorphising the hens and arguing that she would kill her at home, because she would feel "safe at home, in the arms of her carer".

Other chicken keepers are also faced with the dilemma of having to deal with 'freeloading' chickens that they consider to be pets. Mullin (2013) mentions the same issue, which especially chicken keepers face who do not only consider their chickens as productive animals, but who consider them as both pets and livestock. She mentions the trend in the United States of people in rural areas creating chicken retirement homes for older, unproductive hens. Chicken keepers who wish to replace their older hens with young egg-laying hens, yet who do not want to cull their old hens can pay for them to live out their lives in these places. While I did not encounter such establishments in the UK, I discovered that there is significant demand for such spaces. In an online discussion forum hosted by Omlet, one chicken keeper inquired about chicken retirement homes.

Perhaps the manner in which chicken keepers deal with 'freeloading' chickens is a crucial indicator that reveal whether they actually perceive them as pets. Following Serpell's (1996, 11) definition of pets, they "are kept for no obvious practical or economic purpose". When chickens lose their productive qualities, they end up having no obvious practical purpose. In the narrative above, Hollander decided that she does not want to keep her hen as she stopped being productive. Others do not want to keep unproductive hens but do not want to end their lives and therefore try to look for retirement homes for chickens. Many chicken keepers do keep their spent hens and one person told me that that they keep them because "they worked hard and deserve to live out their lives in peace".

The next section describes practices of slaughtering/culling chickens and how small-scale chicken keepers emotionally deal with it when they are emotionally attached to their chickens.

7.5.2 Cooling-off and emotional detachment

Shannon offers a from-hatch-to-despatch class for chicken keepers. In this class, Shannon teaches novices about how to hatch chicks in an incubator, how to care for a broody hen and chicks, and finally how to despatch grown chickens using the broomstick (see chapter 5 'Apprenticeship in chicken keeping' for a description of the broomstick method). According to Shannon it is her most popular class. There is a rising popularity in classes on how to slaughter chickens, often with an emphasis on how to kill a chicken humanely. The Human Slaughter Association (HSA) offer humane slaughter classes to the public. They define humane slaughter as (HSA n.d.):

Slaughter can be humane if an animal is protected from avoidable excitement, pain or suffering. To achieve this, the animal must be effectively restrained and then stunned, rendering it insensible to pain, and finally bled rapidly and profusely to ensure death before recovery could occur.

Shannon's way of dispatching a chicken with the broomstick method has also been shown and explained in numerous YouTube videos and is said (in some of the videos and by Shannon and Simon) to be a quick and "dead easy" way of ending a chicken's life. I took part in the from-hatch-to-despatch class during my stay with Shannon and Jamie. Shannon usually only despatches male birds that she also prepares and eats. Cockerels of

lighter and smaller breeds are culled soon after Shannon is able to sex them, often only days after they hatched. Lighter breeds do not put on enough meat to “make it worth the effort” (quote Shannon) to butcher the bird and prepare it as a meal. Amy and Simon both put an emphasis on the fact that they let the chickens they despatch live for several months before they end their lives. They both explained to me that they feel better giving these birds a few good months of life rather than killing them of as soon as they know they are cockerels.

Chicken keepers care about their chickens, yet sometimes kill some of their chickens, creating at times a paradoxical situation. Arluke and Sanders (1996) describe, in their study of an animal shelter, the emotional difficulty shelter workers experience when they have to euthanise animals they grew emotionally attached to. Often shelter animals are named and especially newcomer shelter workers become emotionally attached to some individuals. Arluke and Sanders (1996) define this emotional discrepancy between having to kill animals that you care about as the ‘caring-killing paradox’.

To deal with this paradox chicken keepers develop several strategies to manage their emotions. One of these methods is to avoid naming the chickens to enable them to maintain an emotional distance from the animal. When we (one course participant, Shannon and I) plucked the feathers of two of Shannon’s dispatched cockerels we talked about how she feels about ending the lives of her own chickens. Echoing the connection between naming and emotional attachment, which the hobby farmer interviewed by Wilkie (2010) made, Shannon said: “Once you name him, it’s over – you can’t kill him”.

When Amy dispatches a cockerel she brings it into the garden shed away from the other birds and slowly strokes and talks to it in a soothing way before she breaks its neck with a quick movement of her hands. She then ties the legs of the bird and keeps him hanging upside down and only returns the next day. At this point something changed: “And when I come back the next day to get it in the morning it is not the same. It is not my pet anymore. It is just a chicken, like any chicken I see hanging in the butcher’s or in Chinatown.” In the same way, Shannon tells me, while taking out the intestines of one of her cockerels, that she often finds it easier to put the chicken in the freezer before preparing it as a meal and eating it. “I put it in the freezer and when I almost forgot about it, I take it out and look at it and it feels like preparing any other chicken that I bought at Tesco”. Both Shannon and Amy seem to require time to cool-off their emotional attachment to their animals. Amy takes the cooling-off time after she kills the bird and leaves it in the shed overnight. For Shannon the emotional detachment occurs after she killed, cleaned and put the chicken in the freezer for a few days or weeks.

According to Ogden et al. (2013), pets are perceived as not killable in contrast to other animals that are perceived as edible and/or killable. How we classify chickens (and other animals) is, however, as I observed and discussed above, more complex than a division into the killable/not-killable and into livestock and pets. Even when chicken keepers told me that they consider their chickens purely as pets and therefore could not eat their meat (Alice and Anna) or their eggs (Catherine), they still ate chicken meat and eggs that they purchased from supermarkets (such as Alice, Anna and Catherine). The animal species of chickens generally remains edible (they consume chicken meat and chicken eggs), even though they would not consider eating their chickens – they were classified as pets and as un-eatable.

When chickens lost their productive abilities, keepers dealt with it in different ways. Some keepers decide to slaughter (such as Hollander) or give away their now unproductive chickens [such as described by Mullin (2013) and as encountered on the Omlet forum]. Similarly, cockerels are either given away, euthanised by vets, or slaughtered and eaten. In all examples, female and male chickens are killed because they are no longer productive. The chicken keepers I encountered who occasionally eat their chickens, do not keep chickens *because* of their meat, but rather eat their meat when they feel they need to remove one of their chickens (such as Hollander, Amy and Shannon).

7.6 Concluding thoughts and chapter summary

In this chapter I continued to engage with the spatial context of where and how chickens are kept but also explored the diverse attitudes keepers have towards their chickens and how chickens are classified. The human and the chickens' living spaces are separate and there is a clear boundary between them. The literal transgression of the threshold between the outdoor space and the indoors space, often goes hand-in-hand with a figurative transgression of boundaries of animal classification.

When chickens transgress the boundary between the outdoors and the indoors, they were described as cheeky invaders, visitors, or even as crocodiles (chickens are considered out-of-place when entering the indoors, just as how a crocodile would be considered completely out-of-place). Chickens pecking and digging in the ornamental flower or vegetable beds were described as vandals and destructors, showing again how spatial and social contexts can create diverse situation-dependent identities animals are assigned.

Apart from the perspective of chickens as producers of eggs and meat (e.g. as mentioned in the city farm committee meetings), chickens were also considered by some keepers a part of the garden ecosystem and with it a potential resource that can be utilised. Once again, in focus is the productive quality of chickens, they are 'put to work' in the garden, their faeces are used as fertiliser and egg shells and kitchen scraps are fed to the chickens, which are supposed to turn waste into food. Furthermore, the spatial context animals are kept in has an effect on how they are classified. The perspective of chickens as part of the garden ecosystem withdraws them further from the human space and reinforces the spatial boundary between these spaces. In consequence, chickens become less classified as pets and more part of the wilderness category on the human-wilderness continuum as discussed by Philo and Wolch (1996).

I explored several practices of chicken keeping and discussed how they challenge the classification of animals in either exclusively as pets or as livestock. I discussed practices of feeding chickens with a diversity of approaches: while some keepers choose an anthropomorphic approach ("I only feed them things I would like to eat myself"), others prefer to feed kitchen scraps to benefit from the potential of chickens to turn food waste into new food. It is illegal to feed food that has been stored in a non-vegan kitchen in the UK due to potential contamination with pathogens representing according to DEFRA a biosecurity risk, yet most keepers choose to feed kitchen scraps occasionally or regularly. Similarly, it is illegal to feed unregulated food items such as dried mealworms, a popular treat for chickens. Andy, a writer who focuses on poultry keeping, warns that "if you eat the eggs they produce then you must NEVER forget they are livestock and a farmed animal"

and that they are part of the food chain, showing once again how chickens stand between the two animal categories in the small-scale chicken keeping context.

I discussed different approaches towards dealing with health issues in chickens. While some keepers seek the services of small-animal veterinarians, others are suspicious about the expertise of veterinarians in treating individual chickens. Until recently chickens were not brought to veterinarians as individuals, but smallholders sought the help of livestock veterinarians for larger flocks. This shift in attitudes also brought with it changes in how chickens are treated. Small-scale chicken keepers also often treat health issues of their chickens at home (with the help of YouTube, even performing minor surgeries on their chickens) and many would end the lives of their own chickens to end their suffering which is caused by an illness. I explored practices related to the hatching of chicks and to the consequences of raising cockerels which many keepers cannot or do not want to keep. While some keepers choose to slaughter and eat these cockerels, others try to find new homes for these cockerels or regularly seek the help of a veterinarian to euthanise these cockerels.

After the discussion of practices of chicken keeping, I returned to the exploration of the attitudes of chicken keepers towards their productive pets. For some keepers the eggs are “a benefit” to keeping chickens as pets, for others eggs are the major motivation to keep them. When hens become unproductive, the latter type of keeper either decide to keep the hens or slaughter and eat the spent layers to replace them with productive hens. The slaughter and consumption of cockerels or spent layers are for these chicken keepers part of the practice of chicken keeping and not the primary reason to keep chickens. Yet the

fact that hens that stopped laying are replaced with productive hens, illustrates that productivity is the most important quality in a chicken for these keepers.

Chicken keepers who slaughter their chickens go through a process of emotional detachment. The practice of naming turns chickens into uneatable/not-killable individuals, so keepers avoid to name chickens that they are not sure they can keep. While Amy achieves this detachment by leaving the dead chicken hanging in the shed before returning to it the next day, Shannon plucks the feathers and prepares the bird before putting it in a freezer and eating it a month later. Both approaches, according to Amy and Shannon, help to perceive the chicken as meat, rather than the individual animal they slaughtered. Often cockerels are chickens that are chosen to be slaughtered because keepers prefer productive chickens and several cockerels in one flock can cause problems.

The next chapter will touch on issues relating to notions of 'the good life' and the 'rural idyll', from urban perspectives. I set the context in this way as I continue to explore the attitudes of chicken keepers by discussing different kinds of motivations of chicken keepers. The chapter will describe what inspires people to keep chickens and then move on to describe the often personal motivations for keepers to continue to keep chickens.

8 Living the good life – nostalgia for the rural idyll

This chapter examines the motivations of keepers to start keeping chickens by exploring the reoccurring theme ‘the good life’ and related to it the concept nostalgia for the rural idyll. It is influenced by literature from Tuan (2003), Bunce (2003), Halfacree (2006), and Ange and Berliner (2014). The empirical material derives from the interpretation of published newspaper articles, material collected during my time at Mark’s smallholding, interviews with and observations of Dora, Katie, Bob and Francine and the interpretation of the place of the rural idyll in Victorian landscape paintings. The first section will revisit the idea of the good life that has been briefly introduced in the Introduction chapter. I will then focus on the concept nostalgia for the rural idyll and how it can help us to further understand the attitudes and motivations of small-scale chicken keepers.

8.1 The Good Life

I collected newspaper articles in course of my ethnographic study of the small-scale chicken keeping culture in the UK. Emerging through the study of these documents was the reoccurring theme ‘the good life’ in connection to the motivations of small-scale chicken keepers. Approximately, every tenth article from the selection mentioned the good life in its title or subtitle: The “good life family”; “back to the Good Life”; “return to the good life”; “living the Good Life”; “the real ‘Good Life’”; and “the new good life” are some of the phrases which were used by the authors of these articles (see Appendix 10.2). But what is the good life?

Tuan (2003) conceptualised the term the good life and pointed out that this concept has several differing meanings. He highlighted the diversity of perspectives and

understandings of what the good life could entail in western culture and concluded that what connects all definitions of the good life is the aim towards a higher degree of life enjoyment and satisfaction. Following this notion, Tuan argued that the good life could not only be based on the accumulation of consumer goods but also on the enjoyment and appreciation of nature. Later Tuan (2003) argued that the good life could also be conceptualised as an activity rather than as based on anything material:

Another way to envisage the good life is to focus on the activity rather than on the physical environment. What sorts of activity bring deep satisfaction to human beings? In civilizations based on agriculture the life of a farmer is (not surprisingly) sometimes idealised. In such idealizations, the good life is conceived more as what the farmer does and what he can contribute to society than as the beauty of the landscape. Other ways of life and occupations may receive glowing treatment in commercial and technological societies. Yet, even there a background awareness remains of the fundamental importance of husbandry: an image of the traditional farmer lingers on as an icon of the good life. (2003, 4–5)

This definition of the good life and the yearning for an idealised version of the life of farming could be at the root of what motivates people to grow vegetables and keep livestock in their garden. It is also a similar notion to the back-to-the-land movement as I have discussed in the Introduction and both can be considered counter-movements to, as Tuan (2003, 5) phrased it, increasingly “commercial and technological societies”.

The Good Life is not only a societal concept, however, but also a highly popular television series first aired in the 1970s whose title was probably inspired by the general concept

the good life. The middle-class couple in the centre of this series yearn for more meaning and fulfilment in their lives and they decide to give up their conventional office work and start living-off-the-land by growing food and keeping livestock in their back garden. This television programme inspired people to live a more self-sufficient life and to start producing and preparing their food at home or at allotment gardens. Alice, a retired teacher who has been keeping chickens for more than a decade, told me that she used to love watching *The Good Life* and that the series inspired her to keep chickens one day too. The timing of *The Good Life* (1975) also occurred together in time with, and this is not coincidental, the second wave of the living-off-the-land movement of the 1960s/70s as defined by Halfacree (2006), when people in Britain showed increasing interest in gardening (Heyden 2013) and farming-related activities. Willcock from the National Allotment Association states in a BBC interview that she thinks *The Good Life* made gardening and farming activities more accessible to the middle-class. Allotment gardening was mostly associated with working class men until this point and *The Good Life* changed this (Willcock cited in Heyden 2013):

The fact that the characters were middle class and lived in suburbia did help to change people's image of what growing your own veg is all about, as it showed a lifestyle which was attractive and attainable... full of hard work but also humour and camaraderie.

As Tuan (2003) points out, the dream of the good life, one version of it being the life as *The Good Life* couple experiences it on screen, is driven by the yearning for an idealised version of the unknown traditional farming experience. Some chicken keepers I talked to said they started to keep chickens because a grandparent or their parents kept chickens

when they grew up (e.g. Luis and Dora, I will discuss this further below). On the other side, I also frequently encountered people who did not want to engage with chicken keeping due to these experiences, as prior experiences do not always allow a romanticisation of rural life as described in this chapter. People who grew up in rural environments have experiences with the unadorned rurality and aspects of chicken keeping.

People from suburban and urban backgrounds, or even rural backgrounds without experiences of farming-related activities, are nostalgic about something they have not experienced before and they do not really know. When I stayed with Mark for a couple of days and we talked about how farm life is sometimes idealised, he told me to read a poem one of his guests wrote about their smallholding that reflects the above described nostalgic yearning for a rural life. The emotional yearning for something often mostly unknown drives people to start keeping chickens and growing food in their backyard, to attend classes on food preservation, sourdough bread, and butchering, and to engage in other typical (envisaged) rural activities. This poem conveys the nostalgic feelings for the rural farm idyll which I describe in this chapter:

We all believe that one day we'll keep chickens

When I get mine, I'll put them in a place like this,
in slightly peeling hen-runs, roofed in time for rain.
Around them, lazy beds with kindling patches;
bees as earnest as librarians,
quietly browsing milkweed; a determined pig.
They'll worship the dazzlingly polished cockerel,
proud as a bouncer; they'll look up
to the Indian Runners hurrying like fools.

I'll live beside them in a house
furnished with the careful absent-mindedness of love.
Flagstones clean of the worst, collecting thread and crumb.
A little ash on the hearth, the table not quite cleared,
the house never quite cold:
*I keep it warm, I'll say, by opening the doors.*¹⁵

The desire for a rural, imperfect but emotionally warm home emerges through this poem and a yearning for emotional safety and comfort which this setting provides is conveyed. The farm's imperfection and untidiness is character-giving and stands in contrast to the sterility and coldness that we encounter in urban environments. This home feels organic, alive and warm. Animals and especially the chickens are an essential part of the rural as described in this poem. The desire to live this rural idyll is summed up in the title with the words: "We all believe that one day we'll keep chickens" – a statement containing inherently the desire for the good life as Tuan (2003) defined it. Here the chicken was chosen as a symbol for the idealised rural they yearn for. In the next paragraphs I will explore the notion of yearning for the idealist rural further by first defining nostalgia and then exploring the collective understanding of the rural idyll.

8.2 Nostalgia for the rural idyll

Nostalgia is a concept that has been used in diverse ways and is similarly to the good life not a clearly defined concept. Historically, nostalgia has been used as a medical term: it stems from the Greek *nostros* (meaning return home) and *algos* (meaning pain). Johannes

¹⁵ Poem by Jo Bell and provided and permitted to use in my thesis by Jo Bell in an email exchange. Jo Bell's website: <https://belljarblog.wordpress.com/>

Hofer, a Swiss physician, coined this term in the 17th century and used it to describe the homesickness soldiers fighting and living far away from their countries experienced (Grainge 2000, 25). Symptoms of Hofer's nostalgia could range from melancholia and weeping to suicide (Grainge 2000; Pickering & Keightley 2006). By the late 19th century, with the disappearance of the term nostalgia from the medical field, nostalgia started being used dominantly in a metaphorical way to describe homesickness not only for a place as in the case of the soldiers but rather for "homesickness for a lost past" (Pickering & Keightley 2006, 922). This marked a shift from nostalgia as a longing for a different place to a longing for a different time (Pickering & Keightley 2006). Mostly the concept is based on the presumption that the "past is no longer available" (Ange & Berliner 2014, 5) and comes with a longing to go back to the lost state.

Berliner (2014) explores how nostalgia has been used by anthropologists in the past. In the early twentieth century anthropologists (e.g. Malinowski 1922 and Lévi-Strauss 1955) had a nostalgic perspective towards the cultures they studied. According to Berliner they felt that the cultures of traditional populations were in the process of getting lost due to influences of Western cultures. They experienced a feeling of loss for traditional cultures who lost their authenticity and felt obligation to record distinctive characteristics of these disappearing societies for future generations. Berliner calls this kind of nostalgia which is based on a longing for a lost past state that has not been personally experienced, "exo-nostalgia". He distinguishes "exo-nostalgia" from endo-nostalgia, a concept that represents nostalgia for a "past one has lived personally" (Berliner 2014, 21).

Most people seem to have a vague idea or fantasy of what keeping chickens entails and what it feels like, as the poem above indicates in its title, "we all believe that one day we'll

keep chickens". The collection of eggs that are still warm, the presence of chickens on a farmyard, the spreading of crumbs or grains, which a flock of chickens quickly collect are all reoccurring snippets of a quiet, rural, life including chickens – imageries we are being fed by popular culture and through the arts. Bunce (2003) describes other characteristics of the rural idyll that directly feed the nostalgic emotions we have towards it:

Picturesque, farming community, recreational, bucolic: these are the words of conventional rural idyll, of the aesthetics of pastoral landscapes, of humans, working in harmony with nature and the land and with each other, of a whole scene of contentment and plenty [...] values that sustain the rural idyll speak of a proud and universal human need for connection with land, nature and community, as psychology which, as people have become increasingly separated from these experiences, reflects the literal meaning of nostalgia; the sense of loss of home, of homesickness (2003, 14–15).

The idyllic rural life and the small farmyard are both imageries of an idealised past as characterised by Bunce which we can categorise using Berliner's (2014) classification of nostalgia, as *exo-nostalgia*, as we cannot experience this long-gone (if ever-existing) past. So where does this collective memory of a never-experienced time and place come from? According to Horton (2003) one important driver for the creation of the rural idyll was the work of publishers and printers after the Second World War. After much of children's literature was destroyed during the war, publishers had to consciously decide which books they chose to reprint. These decisions had a major effect on what the post-war generation of children of the 1950s and 1960s got to read and were exposed to. Children's literature was deliberately turning to themes encouraging enthusiasm for technological

development, talent, heroism, and opportunity often set into idyllic rural landscapes and taking place in rural villages. Nostalgia for rural life and a valuing for pastoral attitudes and lifestyle was a theme that was reproduced frequently in the children's literature of the post-war times and has been carried on ever since (Horton 2003).

8.2.1 Living with Maud, Mabel, and Millie

The connection between nostalgia for the idealised rural past and the keeping of chickens can also be observed in the names keepers choose for their chickens: chicken keepers live with Maud, Tillie, Cleo, Penny, Mabel, May, Maggie, Margie, Millie, Minnie, Blossom, Gertrude, Henrietta, Harriet, Beatrice. Edgar, Bob, and Bertie are the names of cockerels I encountered. I have mentioned the role the practice of naming plays in creating a biography and in the individualisation of an animal in chapter 7 'Edible pets – transgressing boundaries'. In chapter 7 I listed other names of chickens that have descriptive or humorous connotations to them such as Goldie, Lemon, Drumstick, Bin Chick, or Houdini. When examining the list of names above, it becomes clear that these names have all in common that they were popular baby names in the late 19th century. Most of these names are part of the top 200 most popular names in England and Wales during this time period (British Baby Names 2012). Again, the choice of these names indicates that keepers experience nostalgic emotions for the rural, idyllic past. Chicken keepers live with Maud, Maggie, and Millie, rather than with Max, Buddy, and Milo (among the most popular dog names in the UK in 2017) or Charlie, Oscar, and Bella (among the most popular cat times in the UK in 2017), which have been popular human-baby names more recently. What appeals to them related to chicken keeping is not only the production of food at home, but the nostalgic connotations related to this activity and the

imageries that chickens and the keeping of chickens inspire. These idyllic and nostalgic representations of the rural also become apparent in British landscape paintings and help us to understand that the rural, and with it chicken keeping, has been idealised at least since the mid-19th century.

8.2.2 Rural idyll in landscape paintings

Examining the idealisation of rural life in pastoral landscape painting gives us another indication of how we have been imprinted with this understanding of rurality. The farmyard painting in Figure 73 was shared on the RBKC (Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea) (2006) virtual museum website and depicts 18th century Notting Hill farm. According to the RBKC virtual museum “the scene is highly idealised and bears little resemblance to the harsh reality of farm work” (RBKC 2006). The painting (artist not mentioned by RBKC) depicts in the centre a group of children pulling a handcart which contains two toddlers followed by a dog in a farmyard. In front of the farm buildings, a crumbling stone wall and a wooden picket fence, another group of people is watching the children – between them some chickens are pecking around on the farmyard ground. The scene is surrounded by leafy trees and buildings in the distance.



Figure 73 Notting Hill Farm (Source: RBKC 2006)



Figure 74 Milking Time - Study of a Farm-yard near Canterbury 1833-4 by Thomas Sidney Cooper (Tate Britain Museum n.d.)

The painting Milking Time by 19th Century English landscape painter Thomas Sidney Cooper (see Figure 74) also depicts a farmyard scene, but in this case the painting is dominated by livestock animals – goats, sheep, horses, chickens and cows rather than by

people. In the background two women are busy at work. The painting is dominated by warm colours - golden leafy trees and suffused with golden light.

Thomas Sidney Cooper and the unnamed painter who drew Notting Hill farm were both part of a wave of Victorian artists who focused on agricultural scenes, farmyard, livestock, and rural landscape painting. Their focus on agricultural scenes was:

fuelled by a nostalgia for the countryside, which was seen as providing a better way of life than the growing and overcrowded towns, English landscape painters began to abandon the search for picturesque and sublime subjects [...] and concentrated more and more on naturalistic representations and everyday agricultural scenes. [...] These were the images middle class Victorians wanted to hang in their urban villas, a romanticised and nostalgic vision of the rural life they had left behind. (Moncrieff et al. 1988, 44–47)

This quote illustrates the manner in which rural artwork of Victorian painters did not only influence how future generations perceived and reproduced rural sceneries but also that it represents a counter-movement to the industrial revolution. This can be considered a back-to-the-land movement as described by Halfacree (2006) (he referred to back-to-the-land-movements in the 1960s/70s and 1990s/early 2000s). The increasing distance of modern, technological Western society “from the soil” (Halfacree 2006, 313) lead to a society that can no longer be “directly touched, tasted, heard, smelt, and especially seen” (Macnaghten & Urry 1998, 106).

Related to the distance Western society “from the soil”, as Halfacree (2006) put it, is the increasing interest in home food production and food processing classes as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter: People of Western societies want to experience and challenge their senses of touch, taste, hearing, smell and their visual sense, as it is required for the production of food as in allotment gardening or in the keeping of chickens.

8.2.3 A home, never quite cold

Jo Bell described the rural idyll in the poem above and conveyed the image of a safe and comforting home that is “never quite cold”. The above sections on the good life and nostalgia for the rural idyll mainly focused on possible motivations of chicken keepers who did not grow up being exposed to chickens or farming related activities. This second category of motivations, which applies to both experienced and inexperienced chicken keepers, is the notion of *making a home* by keeping chickens and chickens as part of *home*.

From the late 1970s the concept ‘home’ has been a focus of human geographers, philosophers and more recently environmental psychologists (Tuan 1977; Seamon 1979; Buttimer 1980; Sixsmith 1986) who explored the cultural and psychological meaning of home. Sixsmith (1986, 282) sums up this phenomenological approach with home defined as more than just the place of dwelling, as “the centre of emotional significance, of familiarity and belonging.” Home provides us with privacy, security, intimacy, comfort and control (Newton & Putnam 1990; Moore 2000).

As I have mentioned in previous chapters, Simon’s father kept chickens when he grew up and after Simon established his own household he soon also obtained chickens. Chickens

give him a feeling of comfort, especially the clucking and scrawling sounds they make – these sounds are part of *home*. Luis, a chicken keeper in his early 30s who moved to Britain from South-America told me that his personal motivation to keep chickens is related to his grandmother keeping some when he was a child. He watched his grandmother take care of her chickens and now associates some aspects of chicken keeping with her, such as the smell of the corn he feeds to his chickens or the act of collecting eggs directly from the nest and having them for breakfast. Due to this association of chickens with his grandmother, he always knew that he wanted to keep chickens when he grew up. Now, living in a different country, the chickens make the place he stays at feel more like home.

Simon and Luis said that it is the smell and the sounds that evoke this feeling of comfort. These sensuous aspects of the practice of chicken keeping trigger emotions, possibly embodied memories as described by Stoller (1997, 47):

Memories may take the form of a scar that recalls a tortuous episode. They may be triggered by the stylized movements of dance, the melodic contours of music, the fragrant odors of perfume, or perhaps, the rhapsody of song. Usually these sensuous modalities provoke memories – and histories – “from below,” histories of the dispossessed that historians never recorded.

Similarly to Luis and Simon, Mark said that he could not imagine to live without chickens and that they are part of “what makes home *home*”. He even kept chickens in secret during his time as a student at the University of Oxford at his houses of residence because he could not settle without keeping chickens. Dora told me that her grandmother kept chickens and soon after Dora established her own household, she started keeping

chickens too. Dora had to stop keeping chickens for a few months due to health issues, but she soon realised she could not be without them and therefore got a new flock of chickens soon after. Keeping chickens structures her daily life and without them, she told me, something essential is missing.

But even Sarah, who only started keeping chickens recently, told me that she got chickens, because she wanted to make a home and settle down. Sarah has a husband and two small children and lives in rural England close to Shannon and Jamie. They were searching for a house for years and after the council offered them a house with a large garden, they finally felt they could settle. Sarah started to grow some vegetables and got some chickens, which made her feel that the situation was permanent and safe and that they did not have to leave again.

The chicken is a domestic animal, bound to human homes for many thousand years. The sounds they make, the fact that they produce food, the connection of chickens to the yearning for the rural idyll as described above, all contribute to the association of chickens as part of the concept home as defined above - home as provider of comfort, safety, continuity and familiarity.

8.3 Shifting motivations

The motivations behind the process of continuing to keep chickens are quite different from the often nostalgic motivations associated with starting to keep chickens. Chicken keepers provided diverse reasons for their continued enjoyment for chicken keeping: the daily routines that organise their days and give them a reason to get up early in the

morning (Dora); the reliable presence of the curious, inquisitive beings who sometimes visit and look inside through the kitchen window (Katie and Bob); the joy of gardening with chickens - having them pick out the worms and bugs from the bed the keepers just dug over (Alice, Ruth, and Francine); or simply watching them dust bath in the yard (according to Mark one of the essential experiences every person needs to make in their life). While eggs and sometimes the meat of chickens are major motivations for experienced chicken keepers to keep chickens, the sentimental and emotional motivations and the relationships keepers have to their chickens are equally if not even more important to them (Mark, Dora, Simon, Alice and Holly, among many others) and make them want to continue to keep chickens.

Novice chicken keepers who start keeping chickens without much prior experience motivated by their desire to 'keep chickens one day', told me that they appreciated completely different aspects after a short period of time of keeping chickens. With this new acquired understanding and experiences the motivations to keep chickens shifted. Alice, for example, told me that she was surprised that her chickens had individual characters and that she bonded with them in a similar manner to how she bonded with her other pets. This comment was repeated by several other novice chicken keepers who did not expect their chickens to have individual personalities and to be social animals rather than mere egg producing machines. Sue for example told me that she was not interested in getting chickens but that it was her husband who wanted to get some hens (whose grandparents kept chickens when he was a child). While Sue thought that the main benefit would be a supply of fresh eggs, she discovered that the activity of chicken keeping had a therapeutic effect, organising her day and allowing her to spend time in the garden to watch them similarly to the ways described by Dora. The emotional benefits of keeping

chickens became the most important aspect for her (she still enjoyed the eggs too). While for Sue the initial motivation was the supply of fresh eggs, she later told me that the eggs were a bonus and that she kept chickens mainly as pets with individual personalities which she appreciated.

In the following section I discuss different types of chicken keepers, with different attitudes towards animals, approaches towards keeping them and motivations to continue to keep them.

8.4 Types of chicken keepers: attitude, approach, and motivation

I have previously discussed the diversity in attitudes and approaches chicken keepers have towards their chickens, the ways chicken keepers experience and learn about these activities, and the infrastructures, materials and objects they use. This chapter has discussed the motivations chicken keepers have to start and to continue with their activities as chicken keepers. Based on this analysis of attitudes, approaches, material culture and motivations of chicken keepers whom I interviewed, engaged with, and encountered through my study of documents related to chicken keeping, I created a classification of keepers in four types: the pet keeper, the utilitarian pet keeper, the flock keeper and the utilitarian flock keeper. The types differ according to their degree of emotional attachment to the individual chickens and according to the level of importance of the productive qualities of their chickens. These types are illustrated in Figure 75 and will be described in detail over the following paragraphs.



Figure 75 Types of chicken keepers

8.4.1 Pet keeper

Pet chicken keepers have between two and five chickens of different breeds. They name their chickens and frequently touch (e.g. hold, pet and stroke) and watch them. Consequentially they can tell apart individual chickens, they are aware of differences in their individual chickens' behaviour and characters and they are familiar with the social dynamics between their chickens. They do not necessarily keep chickens because of the eggs but usually enjoy to collect and to eat them. While for some pet chicken keepers the supply of fresh eggs was an important initial motivation to start keeping chickens, they continue to keep them especially because they enjoy living with chickens at their homes. They enjoy providing their chickens with toys and food treats, and surround themselves with chicken related memorabilia. Facebook groups and blogs are an important site where pet chicken keepers exchange information and experiences but also socialise with each other. When chickens are ill, home remedies and advice is sought on the Internet such as

on Facebook groups and blogs. The culling of chickens at home (and their consumption) is not an option, but they seek the help of veterinarians to treat illness and to euthanise their chickens when necessary. When their hens hatch chicks, they try to find new homes for their male chicks (and use for it Facebook, preloved.co.uk and Gumtree) or find other humane ways to deal with them. Examples of this type of chicken keeper are Catherine, Alice, Katie and Sue.

8.4.2 Utilitarian pet keeper

The utilitarian pet keeper has between two and 20 chickens of mostly different breeds. They name all or some of their chickens and frequently touch and watch them. Consequentially they can tell apart most of their individual chickens: they are aware of differences in the individual's behaviour and in their individual characters and they are familiar with the social dynamics between their chickens. Eggs are an important aspect of the chicken keeping experience and that some of their hens are productive is important for the utilitarian pet keeper. Once their hens stop laying eggs, this chicken keeper purchases new productive hens, and either slaughters and consumes the 'spent' hens (such as Hollander), or keeps them in the flock. When this chicken keeper hatches chicks, they either give cockerels away to another home or raise and slaughter the cockerels for their meat (such as Amy). They enjoy providing their chickens with toys and food treats, and surround themselves with chicken related memorabilia. Facebook groups and blogs are a place where they exchange information and experiences and socialise with each other. When chickens are ill, home remedies and advice is sought on the Internet. When they believe a chicken should be euthanised, they will put it down at home. Examples for this chicken keeper are Amy, Hollander and Zoe.

8.4.3 Flock keeper

The flock keeper keeps between five and 50 chickens of diverse breeds. They do not name their chickens and while they frequently watch and observe them and the social dynamics within their flock, they do not concern themselves with identifying individuals and their characters or characteristics. This type of chicken keeper enjoys living with (alongside) chickens and the routines, soundscapes, and activities of chicken keeping. Eggs are appreciated. However, they do not keep chickens because of the eggs, but because of their attachment to these animals. While they are emotionally attached to their flock of chickens, they are not attached to individual chickens. 'Spent' hens are not slaughtered but kept in the flock, as productivity is not the most important characteristic in a chicken. They raise and keep cockerels and slaughter some of the cockerels for their meat, as they perceive this to be part of the process of chicken keeping. They do not provide their chickens with toys and treats but occasionally feed them greens and other scraps. They do not believe that chickens enjoy being touched or stroked as other pets would. When a chicken dies, these chicken keepers usually do not mourn it - they believe that this is part of the process of chicken keeping and that "you lose some and you gain some". When they believe a chicken should be euthanised, they will put it down at home. The Internet, blogs and Facebook are not an important source for knowledge or for socialising for this chicken keepers. Examples for this chicken keeper are Mark, Simon and Fred.

8.4.4 Utilitarian flock keeper

The utilitarian flock keeper keeps between five and 50 chickens of laying, broiler, or dual-purpose breeds. They do not name their chickens. The individuality of their chickens is

not important for this chicken keeper. While they enjoy keeping chickens, their focus lies on the production of food at home. Eggs and meat are an important aspect of the chicken keeping experience. Once their hens stop laying eggs, this chicken keeper purchases new productive hens and slaughters and consumes the 'spent' hens. When this chicken keeper hatches chicks, they raise and slaughter the cockerels for their meat. When chickens are ill, home remedies and advice is sought on the Internet, such as on Facebook groups and blogs or professional help is sought with a veterinarian. When they believe a chicken should be euthanised, they will put it down at home. Examples for this chicken keeper are Shannon and Jamie, Paul, and the current Growhampton chicken project.

Table 3 Types of small-scale chicken keepers - summary of descriptions

	No. of chickens	Attached to individual?	Importance of productivity	Toys & treats?	Vet or home treatment?	Unwanted cockerels
Pet keeper	2-5	Always	Not important	Yes	Vet	Given away or euthanised by vet
Utilitarian pet keeper	2-20	Often	Important	Yes	Home	Given away or slaughtered
Flock keeper	5-50	No	Not important	No	Home	Slaughtered
Utilitarian flock keeper	5-50	No	Crucial	No	Vet or Home	Slaughtered

8.5 Concluding thoughts and chapter summary

This chapter discussed the motivations of chicken keepers to start and to continue to keep chickens. In the beginning of the chapter, I described how ‘the good life’ has been a term that has been frequently mentioned by newspaper articles in relation to the recent increasing interest in small-scale chicken keeping. I discussed ‘the good life’ as defined by Tuan (2003), who described it as a concept created by people belonging to commercial and technological societies. For Tuan (2003), the good life is the idealised, meaningful activities of farmers who perform fundamentally important work such as husbandry and food production. The Good Life, a widely popular 1970s television series, plays on this yearning of the middle-class for a meaningful, fundamentally important occupation. The couple in the focus of The Good Life start growing food in their garden and start keeping chickens. The yearning for the good life as envisioned in this television series was not only a phenomenon in the 1970s, but can also be found today. Rural life is idealised and

romanticised, as also expressed in the poem by Jo Bell which was included in this chapter. The rural as described in her poem is imperfect and messy but safe, warm and comforting. The desire for the rural idyll and the emotions related to it are summed up in the title: 'We all believe that one day we'll keep chickens', making chickens an integral part of the rural idyll.

I related the concepts the good life and the rural idyll with literature on nostalgia to further explore motivations of chicken keepers. Originally 'nostalgia' was a term used to describe the deeply emotional feeling of homesickness of soldiers for their home-countries in the 17th century. Later 'nostalgia' was not only used for the emotional yearning for a distant place, but also for a past time that is no longer available. The time or place a person is yearning for is hereby not always known: exo-nostalgia is the yearning for a past time or place that has not been personally experienced and is therefore unknown. Nostalgia for the rural idyll can be considered exo-nostalgic, as this past, if it ever existed, an idealised rural idyll, has not been experienced personally. Chicken keepers live with Maud, Tillie, Cleo, Mabel and Maggie, all names of chickens, rather than with Charlie, Oscar and Bella (cat names) or Max, Buddy and Milo (dog names). While the chickens' names were most popular names for human babies in the late 19th century, the names for cats and dogs were popular more recently. We can find the rural idyll in children's literature and in Victorian landscape painting, among many other examples in art and pop culture. According to Moncrieff et al. (1988) landscape paintings were popular with the Victorian middle-class as they showed a romanticised, nostalgic version of the rural life they had left behind. The Victorian middle-class can therefore be considered one of the first waves of the back-to-the-land movement as conceptualised by Halfacree (2006).

After this discussion of the motivations of chicken keepers related to a fascination with the good life and a nostalgic yearning for the rural idyll, I returned to a discussion of motivations that were more directly connected to the activity of chicken keeping. Keepers, who have been keeping chickens for longer periods of times appreciate living with these animals and other benefits that come with keeping chickens. Keeping chickens provide Simon, Mark, Luis and Sarah with a sense of home. Home has been conceptualised as centre of emotional significance and belonging and as place that offers comfort and safety (Sixsmith 1986; Newton & Putnam 1990; Moore 2000). This is reflected in how Sarah related to her chickens. Her chickens symbolise the security of settling down and the making of a home. Simon and Mark associate the soundscape and the living alongside chickens as important aspects of what they understand as home – providing them with comfort and a feeling of safety. Luis, Dora and other chicken keepers, associate chicken keeping with a close family member. Certain sensuous experiences such as the smell of corn, remind Luis of his grandmother and give him comfort and a sense of home.

I discussed the shifting motivations of people to start keeping chickens towards motivations to continue to keep chickens. Keepers who initially started keeping chickens, because of motivations related to nostalgia for the rural idyll or due to wanting to settle down and make a home, continue to keep them for diverse other reasons. Besides the supply of fresh eggs, which for many was an important motivation to keep chickens, keepers continue to keep chickens due to an appreciation of the chickens' nature and develop an emotional attachment to these animals. After exploring the motivations of chicken keepers in my study, I created and discussed a typology of chicken keepers. My typology consists of four types of chicken keepers, which were classified according to two

dimensions: emotional attachment to the individual chicken and importance of the chickens' productivity. While pet chicken keepers and utilitarian pet chicken keepers are emotionally attached to the individual chickens, flock keepers and utilitarian flock keepers are not. On the other hand, utilitarian pet keepers and utilitarian flock keepers keep chickens predominantly for their productive qualities. Flock keepers and Pet keepers keep chickens primarily for their enjoyment of living with these animals and their emotional attachment to chickens.

9 Final reflections and conclusions

Throughout the chapters of this thesis, I have described and discussed the approaches, attitudes, ways of learning, motivations, and a diversity of experiences and engagements of small-scale chicken keepers with their chickens. My aim was to explore the small-scale chicken keeping culture and in parallel to understand the human-chicken relationship in this context. As previously mentioned in the introduction, this context is of great interest as it provides us the opportunity to explore the emotional and sensuous relationships of humans with an animal that has been primarily perceived as food in Western societies. Small-scale chicken keepers have both utilitarian and emotional relationships with their chickens. Often, they refer to their chickens as pets, yet they eat their eggs and at times consume their flesh, making these human-chicken relationships an intriguing subject to study.

In this thesis, I illustrated how these emotional, utilitarian and at times ambiguous relationships and attitudes are reflected in the diversity of practices, structures, material culture and infrastructures, spaces and boundaries, and sensuous and emotional engagements and interactions. In the following paragraphs I will summarise and reflect on the findings of my thesis through several emerging themes. I will begin with a socio-spatial perspective. I will then move on to discuss my findings within the theme 'Knowing and skilled sensing' where I will provide a reflection primarily on the enskilment processes and the sensuous experiences of chicken keepers. In the last two sections, 'The flock and the individual' and 'Using chickens as producers - of food and of the good life' I will summarise and explore findings related to the attitudes and motivations of chicken keepers.

9.1 Human spaces - chicken spaces

In several chapters a socio-spatial perspective was chosen to enable the discussion of the attitudes keepers have towards chickens and of the identities that emerge through these contexts. In chapter 4 'The Architecture of chicken keeping', I described the material culture and infrastructures related to chicken keeping. The types of chicken houses and the enclosures chicken keepers use to *keep* their chickens secured and contained was one of the focal interests of this chapter. Keepers protect their chickens from "sly Mr Fox" by investing money and time into enclosures and in daily letting-out/locking-up routines. Chickens were contained and kept in assigned spaces, away from cultivated parts of the garden and from indoors spaces designated for humans. When chickens transgressed these boundaries, they were assigned identities that insinuated their out-of-placeness. Examples of this were the identities assigned to chickens as vandals (the pecking and digging in the garden) and as cheeky, curious visitors or as crocodiles (entering the indoors), as previously described and discussed in chapter 7 'Edible pets'.

On the other hand, in some cases, the chicken area required adaptation in order to make it appropriate in a home, as I previously described in chapter 6 'Feeling (for) chickens'. Odours and faeces and the crowing of cockerels are all deemed inappropriate in the human sphere. Here the human sphere is defined as residential areas and generally urban areas. The inappropriateness of animals in certain spaces was paralleled with Philo's (1995) patterns of inclusion and exclusion of livestock from cities and with Philo and Wolch's (1996) discussion of animal classification according to the spatial continuum from wilderness to purely human spaces. Frequent cleaning routines and the cleaning of the chicken area prior to my visits, illustrated that to be fully appropriate in human spaces,

the chicken area needed to be put in order to be in-place rather than out-of-place (Douglas, 1978). When chickens are framed as part of the garden ecosystems, they are removed from the human sphere, and become part of nature. Following Philo and Wolch (1996) socio-spatial classification of animals, by thinking of chickens as part of the natural world, we place them in the wilderness distant from the human space. Chickens are then not classified as pets (animals who are close to the human sphere) but are placed towards the feral end of the animal classification continuum as introduced by Philo and Wolch (1996).

Chickens and chicken keepers spend physically separate lives, in most cases, living *alongside* - humans in the indoors and chickens in the outdoors. When Sue compared and contrasted her level of emotional attachment to her chickens with her attachment to her dog and cat, she mentioned that this separation of living spaces represents a crucial difference to her. Chickens are according to Sue social creatures, but “are more into what they do” leading independent lives. This stands in contrast with conventional pets that live mostly *with* the humans indoors. Living alongside chickens does not, however, mean that the chickens’ and humans’ lives are not connected (Latimer 2013). In Latimer’s “notion of ‘being alongside’ as a form of dwelling” (2013, 22) humans live with chickens in instances of separation and connections. The daily routines, homes, and lives of keepers are altered due to the presence of chickens. Chickens and humans meet every day: their keepers could be watching them through the kitchen window, feeding them or letting them out/locking them in the enclosure. Instances of connections also include living with the chicken memorabilia that find their way indoors or spending time on the Internet engaging with other chicken keepers and discussing chickens. The chickens’ presence in the human sphere (the indoors

and the virtual space), can be considered an extension of the practice of chicken keeping and was discussed in detail in chapter 4 'The Architecture of chicken keeping'.

9.2 Knowing chickens and skilled sensing

Knowing and learning to know chickens and how to care for them was a focus of chapters 5 and 6. In both chapters, I explored the role of sensuous experiences in chicken keeping. To read and to interpret their chickens' behaviour, keepers rely on their increasingly skilled senses. Through an enskilment process (Palsson 1994) chicken keepers become knowledgeable and learn to use their senses to know and care for their chickens.

Through my involvement in Growhampton I was able to explore and immerse myself in the enskilment processes of chicken keeping. Palsson's (1994) enskilment approach, which is informed by theories on practical knowledge and learning processes, are based on the novice's active participation and personal engagement. As novice chicken keepers (Theresa, Growhampton volunteers and myself), we were dependent on the feedback and advice of more experienced keepers. Simon, a friend and chicken keeping expert, continuously offered advice, gave hands-on demonstrations, and answered our questions: for example, how to perform a lice treatment, and how to catch and hold a chicken. He provided us with feedback and helped us when we required expert advice. We also sought expertise in the virtual space, especially on YouTube, blogs, and Facebook. YouTube videos provided us with a way to observe others perform the skills we wished to acquire. This was especially relevant for the slaughtering and butchering of cockerels. The observation of others performing an activity and our subsequent imitation of these performances provided us with a way to acquire practical knowledge that would

otherwise not be acquired through more conventional media such as reading books or reviewing newspaper articles.

Besides regularly relying on support and advice from experts and online sources, we became apprentices of the chickens themselves as well. We learned to care for the chickens by listening to, touching, watching, and observing them. We familiarized ourselves with their daily routines and learned from mistakes and difficulties we encountered during the processes associated with caring for them. Touching the chickens' crops; smelling their breath; evaluating the colour of their faeces; feeling with the fingertips between the feathers for lice; listening to the diversity of chicken sounds and interpreting their meaning; and hours of observing their movements, interactions and general behaviour – these sensuous experiences turned us into skilled chicken keepers.

The enskilment process was not primarily based on reading about chickens in related books but was rather based on learning-by-doing, asking for advice, looking for solutions for the issues and insecurities that arose regularly, and on spending time with the animals we cared for and attempted to understand.

9.3 The flock and the individual

In chapter 3 'Classifying chickens', I initially discussed different types of chicken keepers with attitudes focusing either on the whole flock or on the individual chickens. I explored the flock-individual approach dichotomy throughout this thesis, and finally created and discussed a novel typology of chicken keepers (chapter 8) based on these differences in attitudes between chicken keepers.

Fred and Mark were important examples of people who enabled me to shape an understanding of the flock-focused approach. When Teresa and I were worried about one of the Growhampton hens and her enlarged crop, Fred told us that we “will probably lose a few but that’s how it is – no reason to worry”. Fred discouraged us from treating the enlarged crop and further advised us “to let the hens be hens and don’t pick them up or pet them”. Mark shared a similar attitude towards his chickens and mentioned, after a fox killed one of his hens, that the hen was too old and slow. He stated that this was nature and part of the process of keeping chickens. Fred and Mark both took pleasure in the practice of chicken keeping and had an affinity for the chickens they kept, but they were not emotionally attached to the individual chickens.

Small-scale chicken keepers classify chickens according to their temperaments into docile and flighty chickens. Mark felt that docile chickens were too submissive and did not behave in the ways chickens should behave. Mark preferred flighty hens because they had *character* and appreciated his hens for “what they are and I don’t want to turn them into something else”.

In chapter 8, I identified and classified two types of chicken keepers with a flock-focused attitude towards their chickens: The *flock keeper* and the *utilitarian flock keeper*. Mark and Fred are flock keepers as they enjoy keeping chickens because of their attachment to this animal species (Mark identifies himself as ‘chicken aficionado’). This stands in contrast to the utilitarian flock keeper, such as Shannon and Jamie who kept chickens primarily for their productive qualities.

I also discussed types of chicken keepers with a focus on the individual chickens. These keepers are able to identify the individual chickens in their flock and highlighted the individual characters and relationships between the chickens. Docile chickens are popular among chicken keepers with an individual-focused approach - they enjoy engaging with their chickens by holding, petting and stroking them. Naming is also a common practice among chicken keepers with an individual-focused approach. Chicken keepers who are emotionally attached to individual chickens tend to refer to their chickens as pets and acquire toys and treats especially for their pet chickens. The feeding of treats, such as dried mealworms also provided a good example of the consequences of classifying chickens as pets, while also consuming their eggs. Pathogens contained in unregulated food items could potentially be digested by the keepers through the eggs. This example illustrated once more that chickens cannot be fully considered as pets or as livestock and take a place between these categories.

I identified two types of chicken keepers with an individual-focused attitude towards chicken keeping. These keepers are able to identify their individual chickens and were emotionally attached to all or some of their chickens. The *pet chicken keeper* type keeps chickens primarily because of their emotional attachment to their individual chickens and the pleasure they derive from this activity. The *utilitarian pet keeper* is primarily motivated by their interest in the productive qualities of chickens, but also at times bonds with and names the individual chickens.

In my discussion of the distinction between 'breeding stock' (or 'my chickens') and 'other chickens' I considered the attitudes of the breeders. Chicken breeders usually keep chickens for years, provide generous space and at times emotionally engage and name

their chickens belonging to breeding stock. Only rarely were they able to identify or emotionally bond with individuals belonging to 'the other chickens' which are destined to be sold or eventually slaughtered.

All types of chicken keepers I introduced above, with the exception of the *pet chicken keeper* could slaughter one of their chickens (often cockerels) for the consumption of their meat. When chicken keepers slaughter their chickens, they go through a process of emotional detachment before consuming the chickens. This was the case for Amy who left her cockerel hang over night after she slaughtered it, but also for Shannon who put her prepared cockerel in the freezer before being able to consume it. Pet chicken keepers do not consume their chickens' meat but seek the help of a small-animal veterinarian to euthanise chickens that are unwell or male as it was the case for pet chicken keeper Anna.

In the next section I will further reflect on my findings related to the productive qualities of chickens and on their role in constructing the good life.

9.4 Using chickens as producers - of food and of the good life

The perspective of chickens as productive animal or livestock has been discussed in chapter 3, 5, 7 and 8. Some animals are inherently associated with a purpose as I have discussed in chapter 7 'Edible pets – transgressing boundaries'. While the pet category has been defined as animals who "are kept for no obvious practical or economic purpose" (Serpell 2014, 11), chickens are associated with a purpose they fulfil. Within the small-scale chicken keeping culture the production of eggs is the most obvious purpose chickens fulfil. Cockerels and hens, which stopped laying eggs ('free-loading hens'), do not fulfil a

purpose anymore and are therefore considered for slaughter and consumption (see the Growhampton cockerels in chapter 5 and Hollander's hen 'Ruby' in chapter 7) and euthanasia (see Anna in chapter 7). Hens who stopped laying are at times also kept in the flock, because they "worked hard and deserve their retirement". There are other ways the keeper makes their chickens work for them. Chickens are used in the garden to clear off vegetable beds from worms and grubs and to fertilise while digging and working through the soil. Their faeces can be also useful and are composted and used as fertiliser. The feeding of kitchen scraps helps reduce waste but also transforms food waste with the help of hens into eggs and meat.

The fine distinction between breeds is not of importance to small-scale chicken keepers. As I have discussed in chapter 3, small-scale chicken keepers distinguish primarily between rare/traditional/pure breeds on the one hand and hybrids on the other hand. While some hybrids represent the perfect pet chicken package (productive egg layers, aesthetically pleasing and colourful eggs), rare breeds are popular for other reasons. Rare breeds are considered more precious, producers of quality products, and gained popularity in recent years, also due to the dual-purpose quality of some rare breeds. Dual-purpose chickens are both productive egg layers and appreciated as meat birds. Breeds of chickens which are considered good meat birds put on enough weight "to make it worth the effort" to raise and to slaughter them. Choosing dual-purpose breeds, as we did in case of the Growhampton, gives chicken keepers the option to make use of chickens in diverse ways: they can use the hens for their eggs, the cockerels for their meat, and after the hens stopped laying they can also potentially be slaughtered and consumed. The choice of dual-purpose breeds provided Growhampton the opportunity to show that the chickens were considered livestock, producers of food, and not as pets. Naming them was discouraged

and the prospect of raising cockerels to be slaughtered appealed to the Growhampton team.

Productivity is not everything. In the beginning of this thesis, in chapter 3 'Classifying chickens', I discussed categories chicken keepers use to make sense of their experiences with their chickens. The categories and chicken classifications that small-scale keepers use are not given and obvious. They are different from the way pedigree breeders or commercial farmers understand chickens. They focus not only on the productive abilities of their chickens, such as the commercial sector (broilers and layers) does, or on the aesthetics as pedigree breeders generally tend to do (breed specific colours, patterns and weight classes). Small-scale chicken keepers are interested in the aesthetics and productivity of their chickens, but also use categories that suggest that the nature of the animal, at times the individuality of the chickens and their emotional attachments towards them play an important role in this human-chicken relationship. They concern themselves with the temperament/character of their individual chickens (docile – flighty), they want to "try out" different chicken breeds and experience differences between breeds of chickens.

In chapter 8, I discussed the motivations of keepers to start keeping chickens and their yearning for the good life. The good life is defined by Tuan (2003) as an activity, rather than as a situation. He views the good life as based on the idealised life of a farmer whose focus on food production and animal husbandry bring them deep satisfaction. Connected to the good life is the exo-nostalgic yearning for the rural idyll. This is associated with "humans, working in harmony with nature and the land and with each other, of a whole scene of contentment and plenty" (Bunce 2003, 14–15), an idea similar to the good life.

Keeping chickens at home helps chicken keepers achieve to “live as much of the countryside as possible in the city” without giving up the conveniences of suburban or urban life. Chickens are symbols of the farmyard and the rural idyll, as I have described in chapter 8 in relation to landscape paintings. Chickens become not only producers of food, but producers of the private, rural idyllic dream at home.

9.5 This thesis and future research

This thesis is the first in-depth ethnographic study of the small-scale chicken keeping culture in Britain. It offered insights into the relationships that keepers have with an animal species which is considered by many to be merely a source of food. My findings revealed that small-scale chicken keepers often keep chickens not only to produce food in form of eggs or meat at home, but also for emotional and nostalgic reasons. I showed, by describing a diversity of practices of small-scale chicken keepers, and recounting a range of attitudes, emotions and connections, that chickens are variously classified somewhere between the pet/livestock.

As I pointed out in chapter 2, two thirds of formal interviewees were female and one third male, which could be an indicator that a majority of small-scale chicken keepers is female. Furthermore, on closer examination of the typology of chicken keepers which I presented in chapter 8, there seems to be a gender bias between types of chicken keepers. While I exemplify only female chicken keepers in the types ‘pet keeper’ and ‘utilitarian pet keeper’, I mention only male participants when discussing the flock-keeper type. As this thesis did not explore gender issues related to chicken keeping in detail, future research addressing the importance and relevance of gender in the practice of chicken keeping could be of great interest. Literature on the experiences of women living in rural

environments and working with livestock (Sachs 1996) could provide useful concepts for this discussion. Furthermore, parallels of how farm animals and women have been treated historically as discussed by Davis (1995) could provide important insights for this discussion.

Further research could situate these human-chicken cultures in the context of a present concern, among some people, for a revaluing and a new respect for food. For example, it would be interesting to explore how the eggs and meat of some of these chicken keepers come to market and who it is who seeks out these products and why. How much does the quality of the lives of the chickens, created by their keepers, become part of the quality of the lives of those who purchase them?

While the scope of a PhD research project is limited in nature, this thesis could be considered as an example of what an anthropological ethnographic approach can offer in terms of understanding the grounded complexities of specific interspecies living. In broader perspective, further, comparative, research into chicken keeping in different socio-cultural, economic, historical, and environmental settings and contexts might offer an intriguing case study of interspecies anthropology.

10 Appendices

10.1 Ethical Approval

The research for this project was submitted for ethics consideration under the reference **LSC 14/ 109** in the Department of Life Sciences and was approved under the procedures of the University of Roehampton's Ethics Committee on 17.09.14.

10.2 Newspaper research

Table 4 Articles related to the activities of chicken keepers in the UK, which in my analysis as described in chapter 2

Newspaper	Author	Date	Title	Link
Daily Mail Online	Boycott, Rosie	22/04/2007	My life as a smallholder, by Rosie Boycott	http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-450039/My-life-smallholder-Rosie-Boycott.html
Daily Mail Online	Raymond, Francine	03/07/2008	This Life: Francine Raymond on the chequered career that led to her love affair with chickens	http://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/you/article-1030492/This-Life-Francine-Raymond-chequered-career-led-love-affair-chickens.html
Daily Mail Online	Shooter, Anne	17/07/2008	Outfoxed! How my husband agreed to go 'al fresco' to save our hens from foxes	http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1035781/Outfoxed-How-husband-agreed-al-fresco-save-hens-foxes.html
Daily Mail Online	Delgado, Martin	31/08/2008	1,000 poultry sheds sold every week as urban families take to The coop Life	http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1050923/1-000-poultry-sheds-sold-week-urban-families-The-Good-Life.html
Daily Mail Online	Tozer, James	13/08/2009	From chicken coops to pigsters: B&Q taps into the 'Good Life' with extensive garden farmyard range	http://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/gardening/article-1206108/From-chicken-coops-pigsties-B-Q-taps-Good-Life-extensive-garden-farmyard-range.html
Daily Mail Online	Burley, Kay	20/08/2009	Kay digs the good life	http://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/you/article-1198810/Kay-Burley-digs-good-life-grows-veg-rears-chickens.html
Daily Mail Online	Hollander, Julia	21/05/2010	Hen pecked! How a pair of chickens in their urban garden taught one family lessons for life	http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1279939/Hen-pecked-How-pair-chickens-urban-garden-taught-family-lessons-life.html

Newspaper	Author	Date	Title	Link
Daily Mail Online	Poulter, Sean	10/06/2010	Suburban boom in keeping chickens prompts garden centre to sell them for £25	http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1285462/Suburban-boom-keeping-chickens-prompts-garden-centre-sell-25.html
Daily Mail Online	Atkins, Caroline	31/07/2010	We've hogged the garden: Meet the rear-your-own brigade	http://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/you/article-1298726/Weve-hogged-garden-Meet-rear-brigade.html
Daily Mail Online	Hart, Joanne	28/08/2010	Boom in 'Good Lifers' is driving up the cost of hens	http://www.thisismoney.co.uk/money/article-1307042/Boom-Good-Lifers-driving-cost-hens.html
Daily Mail Online	Stocks, Jenny	13/11/2010	Think living the Good Life will cut your food bills? Don't count your chickens (Going to the supermarket will save you a FORTUNE!)	http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1329319/Going-supermarket-save-FORTUNE.html
Daily Mail Online	N/A	18/03/2011	Other towns are laughing at us': Anger as council proposes limiting chicken mating to 0 days a year after complaints about noise	http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1367556/Anger-council-proposes-limiting-chicken-mating-10-days-year-complaints-noise.html
Daily Mail Online	N/A	27/05/2011	Student fined for having a chicken at Oxford University	http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1391388/Student-fined-having-chicken-Oxford-University.html
Daily Mail Online	N/A	01/08/2011	Spreading new wings: 700,000 have flocked to join the craze for hen-keeping	http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2020922/700-000-Brits-chickens-flock-join-hen-keeping-craze.html
Daily Mail Online	Wilkes, David	07/04/2012	We're going to need a smaller frying pan: The hen laying claim to a new world record following mini egg arrival in time for Easter	http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2126392/Hen-lays-worlds-smallest-egg.html
Daily Mail Online	Osborne, Lucy	19/11/2012	Health risk to poultry farms from the back garden flocks: Experts warn diseases could easily spread	http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2235487/Health-risk-poultry-farms-garden-flocks.html

Newspaper	Author	Date	Title	Link
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The Telegraph	Dickinson, Becky	21/02/2015	Why a chicken might be the perfect pet for you	http://www.telegraph.co.uk/pets/why-a-chicken-might-be-the-perfect-pet-for-you/

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The Telegraph	Guinness, Bunny	17/03/2016	The benefits of keeping fowl in the garden	http://www.telegraph.co.uk/gardening/how-to-grow/the-benefits-of-keeping-fowl-in-the-garden/
The Telegraph	Willgress, Lydia	09/05/2016	Hipster hens' targeted by thieves, insurer warns	http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/05/09/hipster-hens-targeted-by-thieves-insurer-warns/
The Telegraph	Krol,Charlotte	14/03/2017	Meet the Boston retirees who knit jumpers for chilly chickens	http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/03/14/meet-boston-retirees-knit-jumpers-chilly-chickens/

10.3 Consent form sample



PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: Amateur Chicken Keeping in Modern Britain

In this project I will be investigating the nature of the relationships between humans and chickens in an amateur chicken keeping setting. As participant in this project you will contribute to on-going efforts to further the knowledge about human-animal interactions in the field of social anthropology. Contributions to this research might include the participation in a recorded interview, a casual conversation or a visit to your chicken flock at your home (whichever you feel most comfortable with).

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Consent Statement:

I agree to take part in this research, and am aware that I am free to withdraw at any point without giving a reason, although if I do so I understand that my data might still be used in a collated form. I understand that the information I provide will be treated in confidence by the investigator and that my identity will be protected in the publication of any findings, and that data will be collected and processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and with the University's Data Protection Policy.

Name

Signature

Date

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of your participation or any other queries please raise this with me (or you can also contact my Director of Studies.) However, if you would like to contact an independent party please contact the Head of Department.

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10.4 Guiding questions for the semi-structured interviews

The following list contains a selection of questions which I asked interviewees in course of semi-structured interviews and conversations. These questions were developed and adapted over time and therefore not all interviews included all the questions in this list.

- 1) How and when did you start keeping chickens?
- 2) Why did you start with it?
- 3) How and from whom did you learn to keep chickens?
- 4) Where did you get your chickens from?
- 5) What kind of enclosure/chicken house do you have? Are they locked up and do you let them out?
- 6) When and how often do you see or visit your chickens?
- 7) Do you have a daily/weekly/monthly chicken keeping routine?
- 8) Do you spend time with your chickens during the day?
- 9) Do you let your chickens in all parts of your garden? Do you let them sometimes inside your house?
- 10) Can you tell apart your chickens?
- 11) Did you give them names?
- 12) Do you know which breeds your chickens are?
- 13) Do your chickens get along between them? What kinds of relationships do they have between them?
- 14) Can you tell apart different sounds chickens make and do you know if these sounds have meaning?
- 15) Do you talk about your chickens with friends, family, or other chicken keepers?
- 16) Do you know other chicken keepers?
- 17) Do you use the Internet to inform yourself about chicken keeping or to talk to others?
- 18) Do you use books or did you subscribe to magazines to learn about chickens?
- 19) Do you have other animals and how do the animals get along with each other?
- 20) Do you consider your chickens to be pets?

- 21) How do you compare your relationship to your other animals to the relationships you have to your chickens?
- 22) Are there any specific smells you connect to with your activity of chicken keeping?
- 23) Do you have or did you have a cockerel?
- 24) Did you ever hatch chicks or do you plan to hatch chicks?
- 25) Did you keep all the chicks or did you give them away?
- 26) Do you eat meat? Do you eat chicken meat? Would you consider slaughtering one of your chickens?
- 27) How did you learn to slaughter chickens and how do you do it?
- 28) What do you do with your chickens when they are ill and how can you tell if they are unwell?
- 29) Would you seek the help of a vet if one of your chickens was unwell?
- 30) How did you deal with the death of one of your chickens? What did you do with their bodies?
- 31) What do you feed your chickens?
- 32) Do you feed them treats and food scraps?
- 33) Do you give them special feed in winter/spring/summer/autumn?
- 34) What do you do with your chickens when you are on holidays?
- 35) How many eggs do you get at the moment and is there a change in the number of eggs they lay in course of the year?
- 36) What do you do with the eggs of your chickens?
- 37) When do you collect your eggs?
- 38) Do you enjoy eating the eggs of your chickens?
- 39) How do you feel about your hens after they stop laying? Do you mind when they stop laying eggs?
- 40) When do you clean the chicken house and which tools to do use?
- 41) Do you have chicken related things at home? Where did you get these things from?
- 42) Did you change your mind about chickens after you started keeping them?

43) Was there anything that surprised you about chicken after keeping them for a while?

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